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ON THE COVER
Massachusetts National Guard veteran Jill Gautreau of Westfield, Mass., is experiencing health issues related to toxic exposure during her deployment to Karshi-Khanabad (K2) Air Base in eastern Uzbekistan. Photo by Aram Boghosian

SOMBER CEREMONY
Lights surround the Lincoln Memorial Reflecting Pool in Washington, D.C., Jan. 19, as a memorial to the more than 400,000 American lives lost to COVID-19. AP

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'Shield & Storm'

Your January cover photo sure brought back memories. I cut my teeth as a second lieutenant in a battery of 155 mm self-propelled (M109) howitzers in my first assignment with the 4th Infantry Division (Mech) in 1971. Later, in my civilian life as a young lawyer, I watched CNN in awe as the U.S. Army punched through the Iraqi defensive berms in the liberation of Kuwait. As the TV cameras panned back to display the armored units racing across the flat desert plain, one of the female clerks exclaimed, "Look at the huge guns on those tanks." I proudly explained to all present that those were actually self-propelled 155 mm howitzers, in the best gloating tradition of the field artillery.

– Mike Dunn, Gig Harbor, Wash.

Rather than a "revolution" showing capabilities for future warfare, Shield and Storm should be viewed as postscripts to conventional war. America's awesome military technologies and the ability of our forces to use them demonstrated that dictators will not be so foolish as Saddam Hussein to engage America in a classic force-on-force war.

America's botched transition from military operations in Shield to an Iraqi government that could establish a stable and effective government is a better example of the revolution in warfare. In Washington, D.C., State, Defense and the CIA (along with other agencies, such as Agriculture) are not well-integrated, yet all must be involved on the ground to bring stability to a place like Afghanistan. The silver lining to repetitive deployments, which have been so painful to our military families, is that we have built a cadre of military leadership that understands the complexity of future conflicts and the new technologies and skills required to carry out our nation's missions. We need to build on this knowledge and not look to wars of the past.

– John Walsh, Palmetto, Fla.

It was only after Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher came to Washington from the United Kingdom and met with President George H.W. Bush that he changed his tune to "This will not stand." Kuwait should thank Thatcher for its freedom, not Bush. I will grant you that after his meetings the president took a much harder line on the invasion of Kuwait and created the coalition that repulsed Iraq militarily, but without Thatcher's intervention that first week I doubt very much that that would have happened.

– Bruce Delater, Stephenville, Texas

Missing from this article's discussion of the Gulf War's "postwar issues" was any acknowledgment of the 500,000 Iraqi children who died as a result of economic sanctions imposed by the victors, according to the Geneva International Centre for Justice. I would think those losses warranted as much space as the fact that the author was a captain during the conflict.

– Harold Martin, Temple City, Calif.

Statehood for D.C.

I read with interest the pros and cons of D.C. statehood (Big Issues, January). Both representatives seemed to have valid points. But I almost spit beer through my nose when I read Rep. Robert Aderholt's quote: "They realized that a state made up entirely of government employees and lobbyists would be a massive conflict of interest, and having the same rights as other states would only encourage corruption, centralize power and destabilize the equality of individual states in Congress." Aderholt should assemble all his colleagues, from both sides of the aisle and in both chambers, and look in the mirror. His summarization reflects the current profile and status of the nation's capital.

– Thomas B. Klis, Meyersdale, Pa.

History provides a path forward. Virginia wanted to reclaim the land it lost to form the district and received it in 1847. The current district can be reclaimed by Maryland the same way. The Smithsonian museums can be broken up and moved to various locations across the United States, so everyone in the nation can enjoy these treasures. We can relocate the various federal departments to states where it makes sense. This will provide a steady workforce that is not downsized during recessions, and a solid tax base to other states just like the District of Columbia has today.

– Jerry Griffin, Long Beach, Calif.

Congress would likely allow the District of Columbia to go back to its original home, Maryland, which has a similar political composition. And if the district was 90 percent Republican, would Democrats support such? (D.C. votes 90-plus percent Democrat.) Not likely.

– Bill Mulholland, Oakton, Va.

The gifts of the bee

As a North Carolina certified beekeeper, I read with interest the article about bees (Living Well, January). Honey is indeed effective at treating colds, local pollen allergies and infections. Bee venom therapy using controlled stings will alleviate arthritic pain. These treatments have been known for thousands of years and are coming back into common usage. But the bee pictured is a bumble bee. A honey bee, *apis mellifera*, would have been more appropriate.

– Russell V. Olson Jr., Davidson, N.C.

The Four Chaplains

Regarding the Four Chaplains (Rapid Fire, January), they were denied the Medal of Honor, apparently because a "land-minded" Army didn't believe being torpedoed by an enemy submarine in time of war was combat. Despite a similar requirement, they were awarded the Purple Heart. Congress later attempted to right this wrong and awarded to each the unique Four Chaplains Medal, explicitly stated to have identical stature to the Medal of Honor.

In 2017, the Harvard Veterans Alumni Organization (HVAO) noted that the Harvard Divinity School maintained the Army Chaplains School during World War II, training the future Four Chaplains. As the university honored its own 17 (now 18) Medal of Honor recipients on Veterans Day 2011, the leaders of its Memorial Church approved an adjoining tribute on Veterans Day 2017 to the Four Chaplains, each one identified by his denominational title.

As a founding director of the HVAO and a graduate of the university's Navy ROTC, I had the honor of drafting both enduring tributes to Harvard's heroic alumni.

– Terence R. Murphy, Bethesda, Md.

My mother's oldest brother, Earl William Wilson, enlisted June 12, 1942, at Springfield, Mass. He was a private in the Army Air Forces, a weatherman assigned to the 8th Weather Squadron, and was on board SS *Dorchester* when it was sunk. He was awarded the Purple Heart, and his name is listed on a memorial in Holyoke, Mass. He played American Legion Baseball as a pitcher.

– Ted Urbanski, Somers, Conn.

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Lace up for second 100 Miles for Hope

When I embarked on the inaugural 100 Miles for Hope challenge last August, I was excited about the opportunity to get more physically fit, inspire others to join me and raise money for The American Legion's Veterans & Children Foundation (V&CF). But throughout the 100-day challenge, it was me who became inspired by the more than 4,800 participants who walked, cycled, ran, swam, kayaked and found other creative ways to participate. Thanks to them, we raised approximately $150,000 for the V&CF while slimming our waistlines and improving our overall wellness.

There was no doubt in my mind that based on the success of the first 100 Miles for Hope, it needed to become an annual event. At the same time, we listened to what participants want in future challenges.

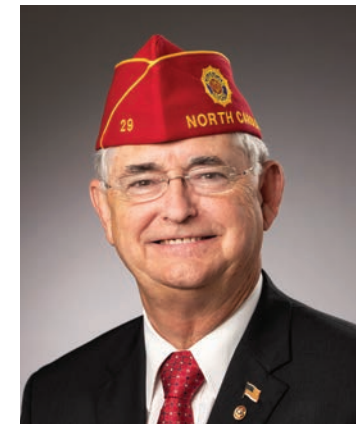
This month, on The American Legion's birthday, we will kick off the second annual 100 Miles for Hope. As I write, we are finalizing the event's framework. I'll share more details on **legion.org** and in my Commander's Message newsletter (**legion.org/newsletters** to subscribe). Here, though, are some ways we're making this year's 100 Miles for Hope bigger and better:

- We're not stopping at 100 days. The challenge will go from March 15 until my final day as national commander in late August, about 160 days. This gives participants more time to reach their personal fitness goals and raise funds to help veterans and children.
- During the first challenge, many participants asked if there was a way friends and family members could donate on their behalf. This year, it will be easy for others to support your 100-mile challenge, driving additional funds to the V&CF. This was inspired by Charlie Parker, a 75-year-old Navy veteran who uses a wheelchair. Not only did he complete his 100-mile mission last year by swimming, but he raised nearly $2,000 on his own for the V&CF. He simply asked people to sponsor him with donations.
- The tech shirts participants received for the first challenge were quite popular. We're offering those again this year and adding more options, including baseball caps, sweatshirts, a patch for Legion Riders vests and more. Proceeds will go to the V&CF.

As for other suggested improvements, we are working with a third-party vendor experienced in handling race registrations. As part of this arrangement, participants will be able to use an app to track their activities – another request from last year's group. We expect the process to be seamless and delivery of materials to be expedited. Once you register, you will receive an email with information on how to download the app, track your activities and more.

I am eager to get started on my 100-mile journey. Please join me on the road – trail, river or elliptical – to improved physical fitness and mental wellness. Best of all, with every step, pedal, swim stroke or other movement, you'll know you are part of a nationwide effort supporting veterans and military families.

James W. "Bill" Oxford



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'COVID OPERATIONS'

The American Legion's phenomenal response to the coronavirus pandemic – food drives, Buddy Checks, blood donations, virtual gatherings and more – is chronicled in a new illustrated book available for $9.99 plus shipping and handling from Emblem Sales. Nothing says "Veterans Strengthening America" better.

legion.org/emblemsales

AMERICAN LEGION BIRTHDAY

March 15-17 marks The American Legion's 102nd birthday. A suggested speech is available at **legion.org/publications**.

Share a recap of how your post celebrated the Legion's birthday at **legiontown.org**.

VIETNAM VETERANS DAY

March 29 is National Vietnam War Veterans Day. Visit the United States of America Vietnam War Commemoration website for photo and video galleries, an oral history and timeline of the war, fact sheets, posters and more. Visitors can request Certificates of Honor and lapel pins, and provide other support.

vietnamwar50th.com

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**I was about to give up…
I wouldn't have known where to go.**

Korean War Army veteran Willie Alvin Cousin,
who received long-overdue and wrongly denied VA disability benefits after his case was reopened and won by American Legion Department Service Officer K. Robert Lewis

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These were important things. It helped them not get behind in their rent… It helped them put food in the refrigerator.

Coast Guard Vice Commandant Adm. Charlie Ray
after American Legion Temporary Financial Assistance helped more than 3,120 children whose active-duty families were affected by the federal government shutdown

Your gift provides hope for disabled veterans and children in need.

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Photo by Holly Soria

"This is the culmination of two years of bipartisan work. There is something in this bill for just about every one of our nation's veterans and their loved ones ... I'm proud that one of my last votes of Congress will be in support of this bill, and I'm also humbled it bears my name and that of my friend. Helping to serve my fellow veterans in Congress these past 12 years has been the honor of a lifetime."

U.S. Rep. Phil Roe, R-Tenn., member of **Kings Mountain Post 24 in Johnson City, Tenn.,** on the passage and Jan. 5 signing of H.R. 7105, known as the Johnny Isakson and David P. Roe M.D. Veterans Health Care and Benefits Improvement Act of 2020. The act contains multiple provisions and improvements to VA health care for women, relief for student veterans facing difficulties getting their education due to the pandemic, a new COVID-19 reporting requirement for state veterans homes, and a revision of the official start date of the Vietnam War-era veteran, from Feb. 28, 1961, to Nov. 1, 1955.

$3.7 billion

Amount in VA benefits secured for veterans during 2020 with free assistance from accredited American Legion department service officers. The compensation included dependency and indemnity claims, death benefits and pensions.

▶ 3,527

VA benefits decision appeals granted in favor of veterans in 2020 through free representation from national American Legion staff claims specialists

Photo courtesy Michael Chitwood/Pamela Rubon

3

Newly chartered American Legion posts outside the United States: Expeditionary Post DR01 in Puerto Plata, Dominican Republic; Returning Warriors Post 0022 in Majuro, Marshall Islands; and Sgt. Oliver Ahlberg Memorial Post TH02 in Pattaya, Thailand

▶ 3,508

Military and veteran memorials posted on The American Legion's national website, from 65 different states and nations around the world. Memorials are indexed by location online.

legion.org/memorials

▶ 275

Vehicles donated in 2020, a record, through The American Legion's Charitable Auto Rides Services program. The donations produced about $141,500 for American Legion programs and services.

legion.org/donate/auto/about

Photo by Jeric Wilhelmsen

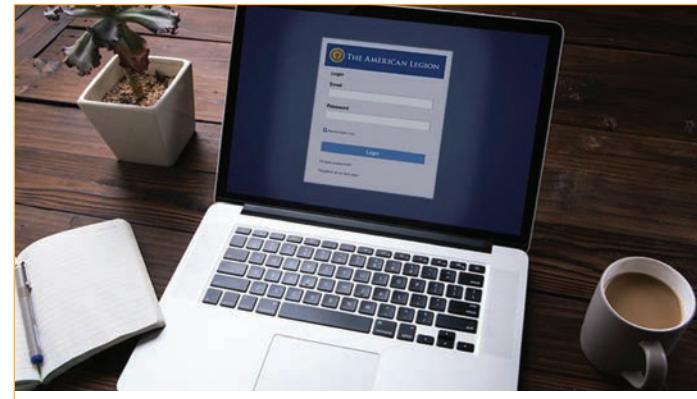
▶ $186,000

Amount in assistance provided to local American Legion posts adversely affected by the COVID-19 pandemic through Jan. 14, 2021. Mission Blue Post Assistance grants provide up to $1,000 for posts in good standing that need help paying rent, mortgage, utilities or insurance due to revenue problems caused by the pandemic.

Photo by Larry Cline

"I had floated the idea through the student population. What I had found, by and large, is they're very interested in organizations that bring services with them. Not only do they bring services, but they give you an opportunity to give back."

Gillette, Wyo., Community College Veterans Adviser Brian Yeager on plans to charter a new American Legion post on campus. American Legion National Commander James W. "Bill" Oxford was on hand to sign the temporary charter for **Staff Sgt. Brian Bland Post 307,** named for a Marine from Weston, Wyo., who was killed in action Jan. 26, 2005, in Iraq.



FROM NATIONAL TO YOU

Single sign-on for MyLegion.org

Are you a registered user of national American Legion web resources, such as **MyLegion.org**, **baseball.legion.org**, **legiontown.org** or **legion.org**? And are you tired of having to log in with your username and password each time you access the individual sites? Good news – a single sign-on is here.

To access the new single sign-on, you must re-register and set up a new password. More importantly, confirm the response email.

On Dec. 31, a new login screen became available that requires users to re-register. Members and non-members will need to do this for a single sign-on and to continue accessing the valuable information and tools provided through the following American Legion websites:

- **MyLegion.org**
- **legion.org**
- **legiontown.org**
- **centennial.legion.org**
- **burnpit.us**
- **baseball.legion.org**

Note: *This requirement does not currently apply to registered users of the Emblem Sales website.*

This new single sign-on is the first in a multi-stage rollout that will allow The American Legion to provide a streamlined and better user experience within its web environment – and it begins with the initial step of re-registering.

HOW TO BEGIN THE RE-REGISTRATION PROCESS

1. Click the "Sign In" tab on any American Legion web property. You will be taken to the single sign-on site.

2. Click "Register as a new user." Fill in the entire form using your best contact email address and member ID (if applicable). All information you provide is kept safe and secure.

3. Enter and confirm your new password of choice.

4. Click "Finish" to receive your confirmation email.

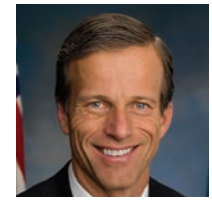
5. Open the confirmation email (check your junk email inbox) and click the link to confirm your new account. The provided email will be from **sso@legion.org**.

Public health-care option

SUPPORT

Sen. Mark Warner, D-Va.

■ Warner is a member of the Senate Health Care Subcommittee.



OPPOSE

Sen. John Thune, R-S.D.

■ Thune is a member of the Senate Health Care Subcommittee.

It's unacceptable that Americans pay more for health care than any citizenry in the world, and that in one of the richest nations on earth medical debt remains a leading cause of bankruptcy.

In 2018, the United States spent $10,000 per capita in health-care costs – more than twice that of other industrialized nations – yet we haven't seen better health outcomes because of it. The Affordable Care Act took steps in the right direction by reducing the long-term growth rate of U.S. health-care costs and expanding affordable coverage to more Americans, but that law was not perfect. That's why I introduced the Health Care Improvement Act, which would create a publicly run health-care option, among other key reforms.

A public health-care option is a common-sense approach intended to supplement – not replace – the private health-care insurance market and provide an affordable option for individuals who cannot find a health-care plan that works for them.

As other nations demonstrate, publicly run health-insurance plans are often more affordable for consumers because they don't take a profit from premium payments, generate greater savings through administrative efficiencies and can leverage the government's purchasing power. To be clear, implementing a public health-care option isn't a fix-all and we'll still have more work to do to improve our health-care system. But with health costs increasing year by year, an additional affordable option to consumers is a no-brainer and something we must consider in this Congress.

THE HEART OF THE ISSUE

Supporters of a public-option expansion of the Affordable Care Act argue that a government-managed health-care system would provide better care and increase competition. Opponents say such a system would be inefficient and raise costs through added bureaucracy.

One of the most significant responsibilities of a U.S. senator is helping our nation's veterans – who have made considerable sacrifices for our country – resolve issues they encounter when trying to access their VA benefits.

Unfortunately, while our VA hospitals in South Dakota rank among the best in the nation, too many of our veterans have experienced complications, delays or inadequate health care due to a periodically ineffective and poorly managed bureaucracy. More government means more bureaucracy, something South Dakota veterans and tribal members know very well from their challenges with VA and the Indian Health Service.

In the coming months, I expect we will hear more calls for "Medicare for All." Others may propose an expansion of Obamacare and the inclusion of a public option. This would mean more taxes on middle-class Americans, and threaten the employer-provided coverage on which millions of Americans depend.

When Obamacare was implemented in 2010, Americans on the individual market lost their plans, their premiums increased, and out-of-pocket costs became unaffordable for many families nationwide.

Instead of government-controlled health care, we need a competitive, vibrant health-care market in which the American people have choices and entities compete to care for individuals and families by offering more services, higher quality and lower prices.

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The Honorable *(name)*, U.S. House of Representatives, Washington, DC 20515 • Phone: (202) 225-3121

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10 WAYS TO REDUCE STRESS

Editor's note: *This is the first in a monthly series of fitness/wellness columns. Before starting a new diet or strenuous physical activities, be sure to get clearance from your primary-care physician.*

From the aftermath of the election to the ongoing pandemic, stress is taking a toll on Americans.

According to the American Psychology Association, one-third are living with extreme stress, and nearly half (48 percent) believe that their stress has increased over the past five years.

The connection between stress and our physical health is obvious, but finding the path to combat it is not so clear. Here is a series of tips, ranging from quick and simple to those that require more time and commitment, to help tackle what life throws at you.

▪ **Exercise regularly.** The key to exercise – anything from walking to yoga to dancing to hiking to weightlifting – is consistency. Studies show that those who exercise regularly experience lower levels of anxiety and depression than those who do not. Exercise decreases the body's stress hormones and helps release mood-boosting endorphins; they can even act as natural painkillers within the body. At the same time, the confidence that comes with exercise promotes well-being, a key factor in daily happiness.

▪ **Get some rest.** Prolonged stress levels have been associated with poor quality sleep and impaired memory, which can lead to increased stress and weight gain. Evidence suggests meditation and patterned breathing can help reduce anxiety and improve sleep. If breathing exercises are new to you, there are many online videos and apps to help guide you.

▪ **Focus on antioxidants.** Did you know that certain foods help lower stress in the body? Eating an antioxidant-rich diet can help increase your blood antioxidant levels to fight oxidative stress and reduce the risk of heart disease, type 2 diabetes and some cancers. Among foods high in antioxidants are dark chocolate, pecans, berries, artichokes, kale, red cabbage, beans, beets, dried goji berries, spinach and green tea.

▪ **Cut caffeine.** High doses of the stimulant, found in coffee, tea and energy drinks, can lead to anxiety. The FDA recommends limiting caffeine consumption to 400 mg per day. Consider swapping that extra cup of coffee for an antioxidant-rich green tea.

▪ **Start a hobby.** Research shows that people with hobbies have lower levels of stress and depression. Activities that get you out of the home – or at least out of your head – can make you feel happier and more relaxed. Group activities, like team sports, can improve your communication skills and relationships with others.

▪ **Try aromatherapy.** Lighting a candle or using essential oils can help elevate your mood. Studies show that aromatherapy can reduce anxiety and improve sleep. Some scents are more soothing than others, but seek out one that speaks to your desired mood.

▪ **Start a journal.** Putting things in writing is a cathartic way to ease your mind. There's no right or wrong way to do it; you can acknowledge what stresses you out, or choose to reflect on things you're grateful for and the positive things in life.

▪ **Laugh.** It's hard to feel anxious when you're laughing, and it can even improve immune function in the long term. Watch a comedy or spend time with those who make you laugh. A study among people with cancer found that participants in the laughter intervention group experienced more stress relief than those who were simply distracted.

▪ **Just say no.** Volunteering can increase happiness, but too many responsibilities can lead to feeling overwhelmed and guilty. By not biting off more than you can chew, you reduce anxiety and allow yourself to focus on your priorities.

▪ **Cuddle.** Positive physical contact – including cuddling, kissing and hugging – can all help relieve stress by releasing oxytocin and lowering cortisol. They can also help lower blood pressure and heart rate, which are physical symptoms of stress. It's been challenging during the pandemic to maintain physical contact with loved ones, but even cuddling with pets provides a sense of comfort and companionship.

Army veteran Jennifer Campbell is a certified personal trainer and has a master's degree in nutrition education. She works with veterans and civilians, from elite athletes to those just starting their fitness journey. She is the commander of American Legion Post 43 in Hollywood, Calif.

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—General Stanley A. McChrystal, US Army (Ret.)

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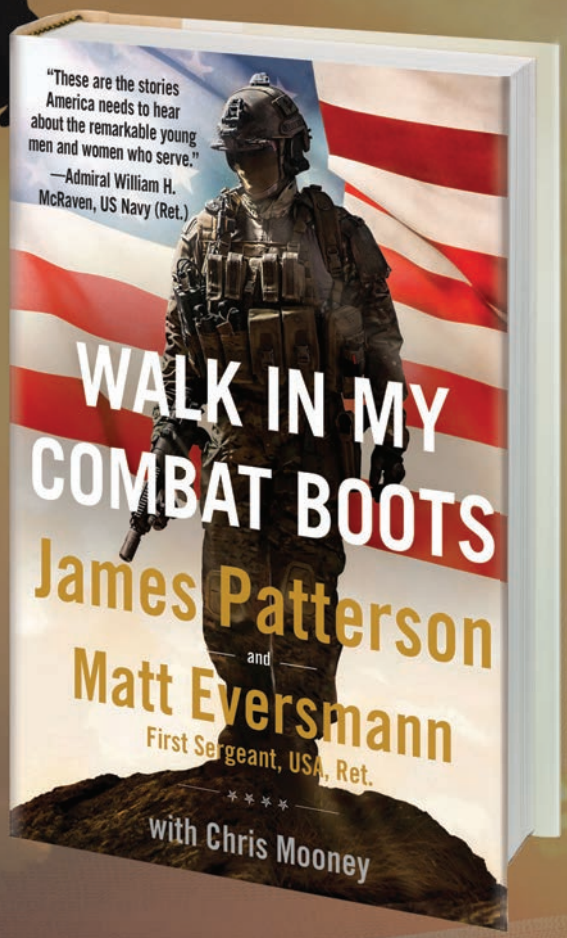
—Brigadier General Peter Dawkins, US Army (Ret.)



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—President Bill Clinton

LITTLE, BROWN AND COMPANY

A look at American eating habits

U.S. health agencies are updating their guidelines on what – and how much – Americans should eat. As *The Wall Street Journal* reports, most of us don't even come close: "We don't eat enough vegetables, fruit or whole grains, and eat too much sugar and refined grains."

For example, the daily recommended amount of fruit Americans should eat is 2 cups. We eat, on average, just 0.93 cups per day.

The daily recommended amount of vegetables Americans should eat is 2.5 cups. We eat, on average, 1.39 cups per day.

The daily recommended amount of whole grains (oatmeal, brown rice and whole-wheat flour) Americans should eat is 3 to 6 ounces. We eat, on average, 0.84 ounces.

A big reason we aren't eating right is portion sizes, which have exploded in recent decades. For example, 20 years ago a typical bagel was 140 calories; nowadays, one comes in at 350 calories. An order of fries weighed in at 2.4 ounces and 210 calories; today, a typical order of fries is 6.9 ounces and 610 calories.

Another reason Americans aren't eating right is that we eat a lot more away from home. In 1978, the *Journal* reports, just 17 percent of the calories Americans ingested were consumed away from home; pre-pandemic, that number had climbed to 32 percent.

What to do? The *Journal* quotes Purdue University nutrition scientist Regan Lucas Bailey, who offers some ideas for healthier eating:

- Choose whole-grain buns and breads, rather than white.
- Add veggies to sandwiches.
- Cut down on portion sizes.
- Cut back – or cut out – sodas and sugary drinks.
- Replace cookies and chips with healthier snacks, such as apples and nuts.

Media Bakery

Living Well is designed to provide general information. It is not intended to be, nor is it, medical advice. Readers should consult their physicians when they have health problems.

Media Bakery

Healthy cleaning

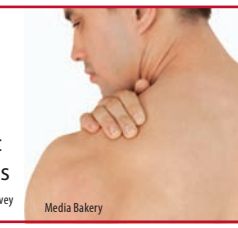
Some of the chemicals Americans use to clean in and around their houses are still in short supply due to COVID-19 – and many are downright harmful to our health. The home-care site **thekitchn.com** offers reminders of a safe, effective and inexpensive product every homeowner has in abundance that can help keep houses tidy while keeping families healthy: water.

- To eliminate lingering smells from cooking, boil a pot of water on the stovetop with citrus rinds. Adding spices like cinnamon, cloves or star anise will also clear the air.
- To restore the luster of tarnished silverware, add 1 tablespoon of baking soda, 1 tablespoon of sea salt, ½ cup of white vinegar and 1 cup of boiling water to an aluminum or foil-lined pan. Let the silverware soak, then rinse.
- To de-scale calcium and lime buildup on coffeepots and kettles, boil equal parts water and white vinegar. Cool the mixture, then rinse the residue away.
- Use a pot of boiling water to kill weeds in sidewalks and driveways. After pouring the water directly onto the weeds, yank them out after the water cools. Weeds with deeper root systems may need a second application.
- To clean a grimy microwave, boil a cup of water in the microwave in a wide-mouthed bowl. After the microwave has steamed up, use a cloth or sponge to wipe the interior clean. Adding lemon juice or a used lemon to the bowl of water can help extra-messy microwaves, as the citric acid helps cut through grease and grime.
- Using harsh chemicals to clear clogged drains can be harmful to health, along with the pipes needing cleared. Pouring hot or boiling water down the drain often does the trick. However, only use boiling water on metal pipes. For PVC pipes, use hot water instead.
- For certain food stains, like berries and grapes, boiling water can help (depending on the fabric). To use boiling water on a stained piece of clothing, dip the soiled portion into a pot of hot water until the stain disappears. For strawberry, raspberry, blueberry, or other fruit stains on upholstery or carpet, pour some boiling water on the affected area and use a sponge to absorb excess water.

20.4% U.S. adults in 2019 who reported chronic pain within the past three months

7.4% who reported "high-impact" chronic pain that frequently limited work or life activities

Source: National Health Interview Survey



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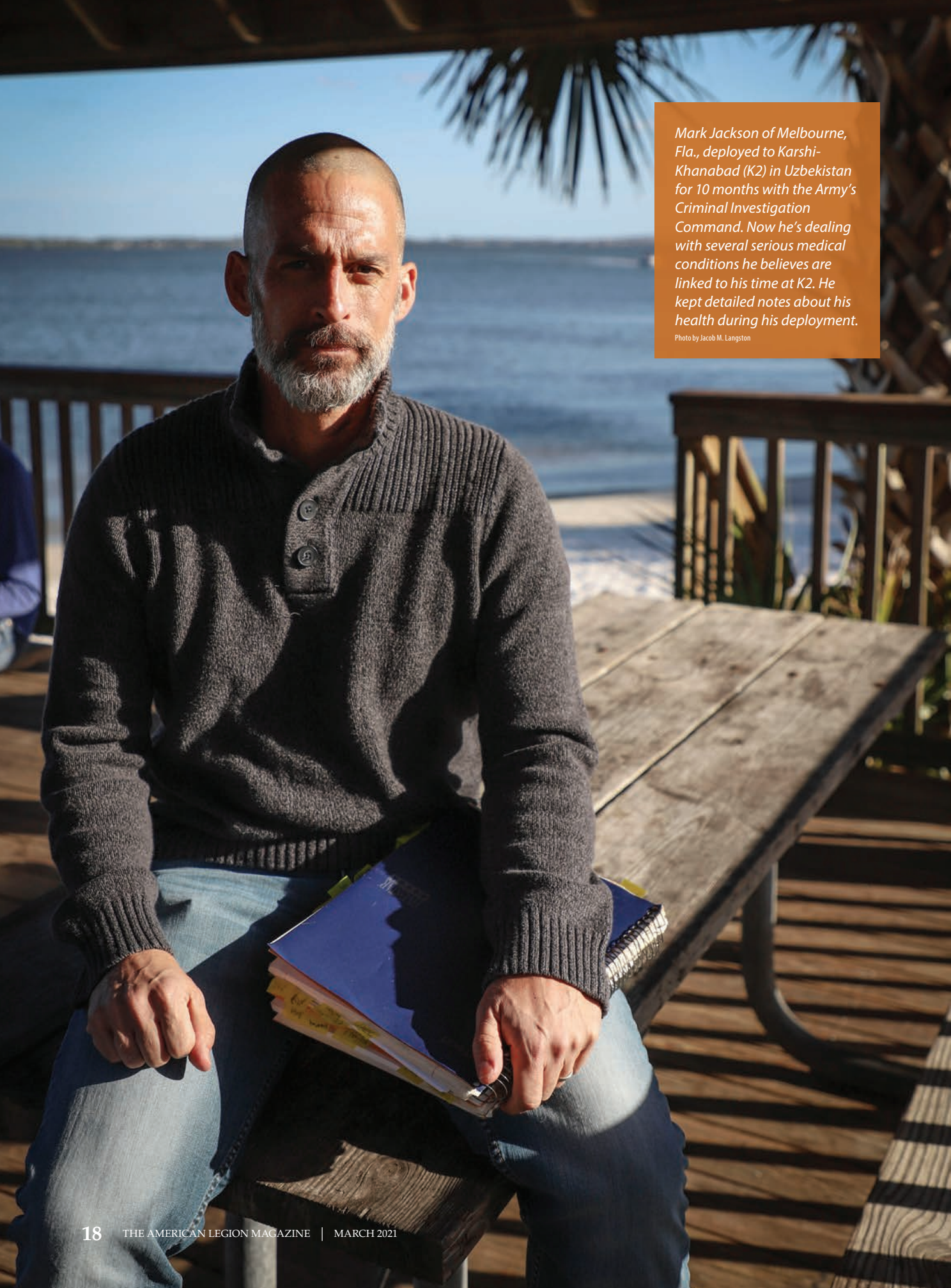

Mark Jackson of Melbourne, Fla., deployed to Karshi-Khanabad (K2) in Uzbekistan for 10 months with the Army's Criminal Investigation Command. Now he's dealing with several serious medical conditions he believes are linked to his time at K2. He kept detailed notes about his health during his deployment.

Photo by Jacob M. Langston

The Casualties of K2

Veterans suffering from toxic exposure at a secret base in Uzbekistan fight for VA recognition they were denied.

BY KEN OLSEN

Clayton White died on his 41st birthday, after losing his Air Force career, civil service job, health insurance, and four appeals for VA recognition that his debilitating health problems were connected to toxic chemical and radiation exposure at a secret base in Uzbekistan. Among the first U.S. troops sent to the region after 9/11, White is survived by his wife, Natalie (who was 8 months pregnant when he died), their daughter and a mountain of medical debt.

"Physical pain is one thing," Natalie says of the nearly three dozen diseases – including pancreatitis, diverticulitis and rheumatoid arthritis – that began attacking her late husband in 2009. "But he believed in this country. And to get the brush off, the denials? He felt like nobody cared."

Approximately 15,000 U.S. servicemembers were deployed to Karshi-Khanabad (K2), a former Soviet military base about 100 miles from the Afghan border, between 2001 and 2005. They were exposed to nearly 400 chemical compounds and radiation from yellowcake uranium and depleted uranium as well as other toxicants that saturated K2 during decades of Soviet mismanagement, which were followed by a catastrophic explosion that demolished an air-to-surface missile bunker and an ammunitions depot after the Uzbeks took over the base, according to K2 veterans and declassified government documents.

Nearly half of the approximately 5,000 members of the Stronghold Freedom Foundation have rare cancers and other illnesses, says Mark Jackson, legislative director for the K2 veterans group. Like White, they didn't qualify for VA service connection for K2-related health issues because until late December military service in Uzbekistan wasn't recognized in federal law or regulation.

"I served at a place that destroyed my body, that until very recently was not recognized by the federal government," says Jackson, who was deployed to K2 in 2003 with the Army Criminal Investigation Command. "VA doesn't care because they don't have to care."

VA says it is following the health-care and disability-compensation requirements established by Congress. But the agency isn't pushing lawmakers to expand K2 veterans' access to its programs and services. Instead, VA argues it needs more time to analyze the connection between K2's toxic hazards and veterans' health problems. The agency is conducting a comprehensive health study of about 10,300 K2 veterans, with initial results expected in January 2022.

"There's a cost to that," Jackson says. "I can measure it in bodies. How much more evidence do we need to show radiation and chemical weapons are bad for human health?"

As the 20th anniversary of the first U.S. deployment to this toxic battlefront approaches, the federal government should stop filibustering and start helping, K2 veterans and families say.

"We need health care and we need health-care solutions to cancers that don't respond to treatment," says Air Force special operations veteran Paul Widener, Stronghold executive director and member of Burton-Cowell American Legion Post 265 in Jacksonville, N.C., who is dealing with several complex medical problems after six deployments to K2.

"We need health screenings for all of the chemicals we were exposed to, and toxicological tissue testing for the other toxicants members were exposed to, ingested or aspirated," he says. "We need to do this for the guys who are sick and the guys who died."

Toxic clues The United States leased part of K2 soon after 9/11 and established Camp Stronghold Freedom on part of what by then was an Uzbek air force base. "We needed to find a way to get into Afghanistan to take down the Taliban," says Widener, one of the lead special-operations mission planners for Operation Enduring Freedom. K2 had been the main support base for the Soviet war in Afghanistan and seemed ideal.

"We looked at all of the intelligence sources," he adds. "Nothing said anything bad had happened

LEFT: Flooding and poor drainage plagued K2, including the area around the mess station. Sandbags were filled with contaminated dirt. RIGHT: An Army environmental survey team found a pool of jet fuel 8 feet below the surface, the result of fuel tanks at the former Soviet base that had leaked for 30 years. Photos courtesy Mike Lechlitner

there," perhaps because all of the U.S. intelligence agencies weren't linked together at that point.

Problems emerged as soon as U.S. troops arrived in October 2001. Uzbek construction workers became ill while building an earthen berm around the American enclave, and a team from the Army Center for Health Promotion and Preventive Medicine (CHPPM) was dispatched to investigate. The results showed K2 was "dirty, polluted and radioactive," says Mike Lechlitner, a DoD employee who helped with that initial environmental survey when not engaged in his primary job of supporting special operations forces making forays into Afghanistan.

One 8-foot-deep test hole found a pool of jet fuel, potentially the source of the fumes that sickened Uzbek construction workers, Lechlitner says. Another turned up a mixture of hydraulic fluid, solvents and other hazardous waste that had been dumped on the ground behind a Soviet/Uzbek aircraft maintenance hangar for decades, likely the source of the black goo U.S. troops found across the base when they first arrived. The United States may have compounded these toxic exposure problems by building the vast berm around its portion of the base with the heavily contaminated soil, says Lechlitner, a member of American Legion Post 175 in Severna Park, Md.

Meanwhile, he contacted sources in Washington, D.C., in search of more information about the base's history. They told him the Soviet jet fuel farm at K2 had been leaking for 30 years and that the Soviets had run a chemical weapons decontamination line at the base in 1987. He also learned about the 1993 explosion that took out the ammunition bunker and spread the contents of the missile depot – including asbestos – throughout the area where U.S. troops later lived and worked. It also pulverized an unknown quantity of yellowcake uranium the Uzbeks had stored at the base and spread the dust across K2, which accounted for radiation levels up to nine times higher than normal.

"Nothing compares to the environmental hazards 50 years of Soviet rule did to Karshi-Khanabad," Lechlitner says.

DoD classified the results of the environmental survey, tried to spread a protective layer of clean soil and gravel across the U.S. section of the base, and stayed four years, during which other toxic hazards surfaced – including reported detections of nerve gas in an aircraft hangar used as an operations center. Clayton White was one of many U.S. troops who worked, and in some cases slept, in that hangar. And in January 2003, engineers found hundreds of glass ampules containing small amounts of chemical warfare agents buried on the south side of the U.S. base that were likely used by the Soviets for training.

Warning signs John Spanogle's Army special operations unit was one of the first to arrive at K2. They weren't told of the base's toxic history and there were no signs warning of its hazards. But he remembers the smell, the black goo, the fluorescent green puddles of standing water after their tents flooded, and the fact that you could grab a handful of dirt and light it on fire – not to mention the dust constantly blown around by the helicopters. He feels betrayed as he tries to make sense of the sudden onset of esophageal problems a few years after he was in Uzbekistan, followed by fatty liver disease, extreme high blood pressure and severe acid reflux. Then there's the number of cancer deaths among his fellow K2 veterans.

"It's my generation's Agent Orange," says Spanogle, a member of G. Chandler Bond American Legion Post 275 in Adrian, Mich.

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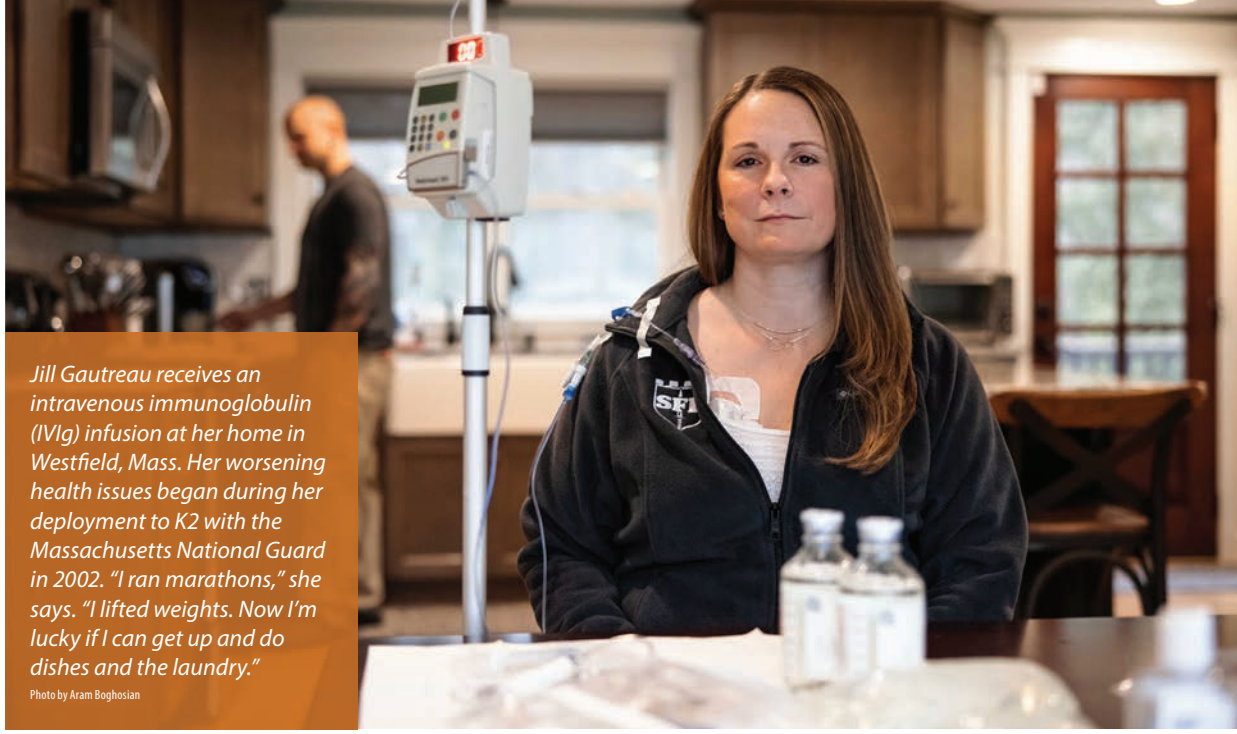

Jill Gautreau receives an intravenous immunoglobulin (IVIg) infusion at her home in Westfield, Mass. Her worsening health issues began during her deployment to K2 with the Massachusetts National Guard in 2002. "I ran marathons," she says. "I lifted weights. Now I'm lucky if I can get up and do dishes and the laundry."

Photo by Aram Boghosian

There were signs warning of chemical agents and unexploded ordnance by the time Jill Gautreau arrived with a contingent from the Massachusetts National Guard in August 2002. DoD told her to ignore them. "They said those were old signs from when the Russians were there ... that everything was safe," Gautreau says.

An MP, she patrolled the Soviet-era chemical weapons bunkers and leaking jet fuel tanks, as well as guarded Skittles Pond, so named because its hazardous contents changed from one unnatural color to another.

Gautreau developed a strange blister rash on her inner thigh a month after she arrived. Her lymph nodes and abdomen soon began to swell, and that, along with dizziness and extreme fatigue, made her so sick she was unable to leave her bunk for two or three days at a time. Blood began appearing in her urine. Gautreau was sent to the Army medical center in Landstuhl for an evaluation that was inconclusive, then returned to K2.

She was diagnosed with endometriosis after returning home, then Postural Orthostatic Tachycardia Syndrome (POTS), which causes her carotid arteries to spasm and her heart rate to spike to the point she nearly passes out. "Basically, my autonomic nervous system is broken and my body is in fight-or-flight all the time," Gautreau says. As a result, she had to leave the National Guard and her civilian job as a police officer.

Gautreau went back to school and earned her nursing degree. She had to leave that career after developing an incurable neurological disease called Stiff Person Syndrome, which causes excruciating muscle spasms that can drop her to the floor without warning.

"I'm watching my body slowly become deformed, and obviously feeling the pain that comes with that progression," Gautreau says. "I ran marathons. I lifted weights. Now I'm lucky if I can get up and do the dishes and laundry." It's a rare and exhausting treat to attend one of her son's hockey games.

Gautreau feels fortunate that VA granted service connection for her endometriosis, although the agency does not link it to her K2 deployment. She also receives a moderate Social Security disability benefit. Both will be dramatically reduced after her son turns 18. And while she has insurance through her husband's job, the costs of her care are steep and certain to increase. "It scares me," she says. "Am I going to be able to afford medicine and supplies?"

Like a bullet Jackson was told he was lucky he was being sent to K2 in July 2003 "because it was safe." A marathon runner, he regularly used a track that looped through a minefield and chemical dump – and was adjacent to a field contaminated with something that caused it to glow at night. He began experiencing intestinal trouble a few weeks after he arrived, noting this and other persistent health problems in his journal throughout his deployment.

Within two years of leaving K2, Jackson couldn't climb a flight of stairs. His thyroid had been destroyed by radiation exposure. He also has gastroesophageal reflux disease (GERD), diverticulitis, degenerative osteoporosis, non-iron-deficiency anemia, a radiation-induced autoimmune disorder and, although fit and trim, is prediabetic.

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Jackson is also awaiting test results related to a possible cancer diagnosis. None of this matches his family's health history.

"What happened to me is just like getting hit with a bullet," he says. "It's doing the same damage, just doing it slower."

Two years after Brian Liebenow's K2 deployment, he had a cancerous tonsil removed, followed by chemotherapy as well as radiation treatment that damaged his face, head and neck. The subsequent reconstructive surgeries ruined the Air Force veteran's ability to swallow – he now relies on a feeding tube – and caused other problems, including partial paralysis of his left side. A severe sunburn on his neck and shoulder, in the area treated with radiation after his tonsil surgery, developed into skin cancer. That required surgery, which led to a wound infection that progressed to the point his left arm had to be amputated.

He and his wife, Elizabeth, believe Liebenow's service at K2 cost them the ability to have children and feel fortunate they were able to adopt their daughter. Liebenow also is one of the rare K2 veterans who was medically retired from the military with health benefits, which has saved his family from bankruptcy. But like Gautreau, he knows many K2 veterans don't receive any help from DoD or VA, either because the base was off the books or because they are no longer on active duty when they develop cancers, autoimmune diseases and other illnesses.

And then there are the widows and children left behind, including Kim Brooks, whose 36-year-old husband, Tim, died of a rare and aggressive brain cancer in May 2004, two years after returning from K2. Left to raise four young children, she returned to teaching school and volunteers as Family Care Team and Surviving Spouse director for the Stronghold Freedom Foundation, coordinating support calls across five time zones. Meanwhile, Claire Partain's husband, John, gave up fighting for VA benefits not long before he died of esophageal cancer in September 2019.

Tepid response The American Legion – long a leading advocate for veterans exposed to Agent Orange, radiation, chemicals, Gulf War-related hazards, burn pits and other environmental hazards – says K2 veterans should get immediate help. This includes VA providing medical exams and treatment for veterans dealing with illnesses tied to toxic exposures at the former Soviet base, as well as assessing the risks the exposures pose for their children, says Ralph Bozella, chairman of the Legion's National Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation Commission. "In the meantime, we need to go to Congress and fight for service-connected disabilities related to their service at K2 and the resulting diseases, and for fully funding research and new treatments for these diseases," he says.

Since 2016, The American Legion has also called for DoD to disclose all hazardous environmental exposures at any facility used by U.S. troops so they can seek appropriate medical treatment, Bozella adds. And the organization is advocating for VA to establish a national center for research on the diagnosis and treatment of health conditions of the descendants of servicemembers exposed to toxic substances.

"The government has to be cognizant of any environmental hazards and needs to protect these veterans and their offspring," Bozella says.

Stronghold representatives have contacted every member of Congress in an effort to secure federal legislation making K2 veterans eligible for presumptive VA service connection for their complex health problems. "The first thing they say is, 'How much is it going to cost?'" Jackson says. "And that's bipartisan."

There's a sliver of hope. On Jan. 19, President Donald Trump signed an executive order directing DoD and VA to conduct a one-year study of toxic exposure among K2 veterans, similar to the study authorized in the latest National Defense Authorization Act.

In addition, legislation signed in early January requires VA and the Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry to conduct a 10-year study of cancers and other diseases of K2 veterans. The Veterans Health Care and Benefits Improvement Act of 2020 also opens VA's burn-pit registry to U.S. servicemembers who served in Uzbekistan. But more studies mean more delays for veterans who need immediate help, more families like White's who are left with little more than debt and despair.

White died in his sleep March 9, 2018. Today, his widow, who is self-employed, puts her daughter to bed and works until 1 or 2 a.m. to cover their bills, including paying out-of-pocket for their health insurance. And while she continues to pursue Clayton's VA claim, she's not optimistic.

"It comes down to some bean counter who decides this population isn't important," Natalie says. "But more than anything, I want my husband to be recognized for his service and sacrifice. He's another casualty of K2, and the loss of his life caused another needless casualty – a fatherless daughter."

Ken Olsen is a frequent contributor to The American Legion Magazine.

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TOUGH PILL

Ending America's dependence on China for essential medicines is not only possible, but necessary.

BY ROSEMARY GIBSON

When USS *Theodore Roosevelt* was deployed in the South China Sea in March 2020, more than 1,200 sailors tested positive for COVID-19. China was not only the epicenter of the virus that spread quickly around the world and among the ship's crew, but the source of the generic medicines needed to fight it.

Over the past 30 years, the United States has become exceedingly dependent on the People's Republic of China (PRC) for generic drugs, which account for about 90 percent of the medicines used in civilian, military and VA health-care facilities.

China supplies 10 percent of generic drugs in the United States and is rapidly increasing its market share. Antidepressants, chemotherapies for cancer treatment, and drugs for Alzheimer's, diabetes, Parkinson's and epilepsy are among the many medicines made by Chinese companies and sold here, as first reported in "China Rx: Exposing the Risks of America's Dependence on China for Medicine," which I co-authored.

China's biggest footprint is in making the chemical components in generic and brand-name drugs. Thousands of our medicines are made with chemical-starting materials and ingredients from China.

Threat to national security The last U.S. penicillin plant in Syracuse, N.Y., closed in 2004 after Chinese companies formed a cartel, fixed prices, controlled supply and sold it on the global market at below-market prices. The same tactic was used to force the closure of the last U.S. factories that made aspirin and vitamin C. This is China's playbook to drive U.S. and other companies out of business.

The United States has virtually no capacity to make other antibiotics for ear infections in

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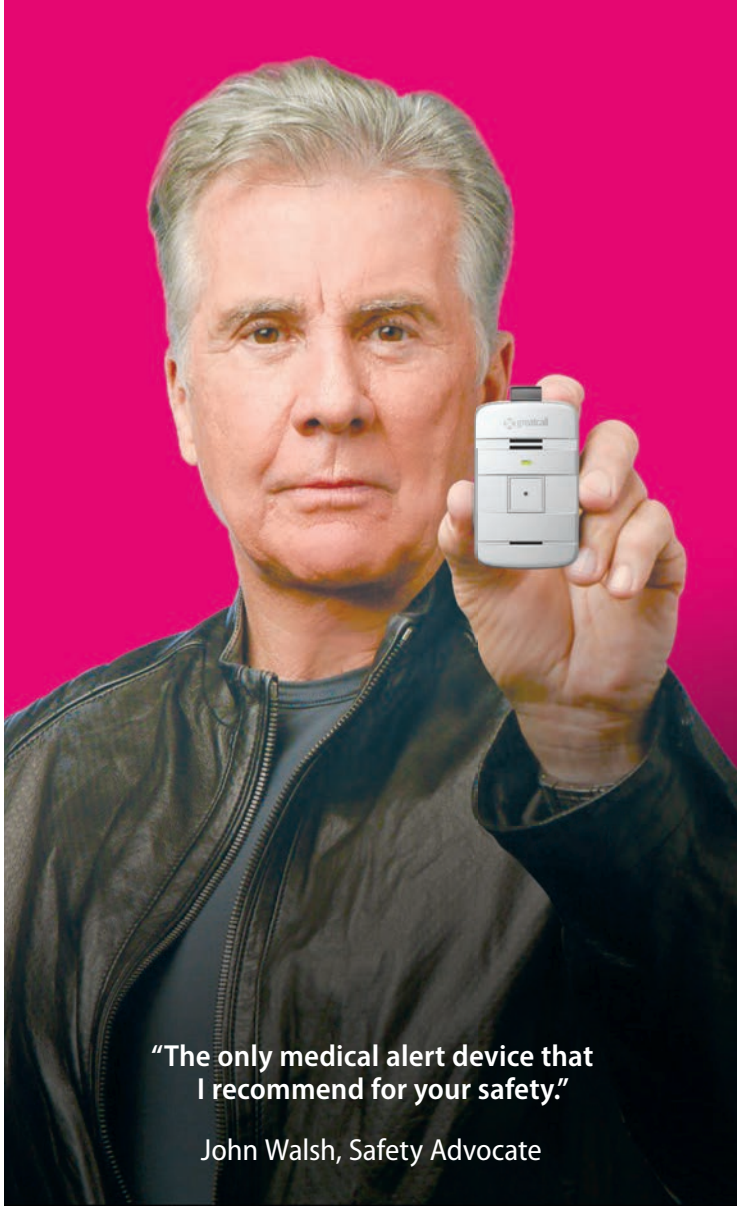

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> **China's industrial policy has been to invest billions of dollars in drug manufacturing so it can achieve its aim to become the pharmacy to the world.**

children, bronchitis, strep throat, pneumonia, sepsis and anthrax exposure. In the event of biowarfare, Americans will depend on an adversary for antidotes.

China doesn't need to hack our electric grid to take down the United States. In early 2020, during a peak period of hospitalizations for COVID-19, the PRC threatened through its official news outlet to withhold medicines from the United States. If China actually carried out this threat, it would be an efficient way to destabilize a country and demoralize a population.

Need for domestic manufacturing As China supplies a growing share of America's generic drugs, U.S. manufacturing plants are shutting down. In December, a facility in Morgantown, W.Va., once owned by U.S.-headquartered generics company Mylan, announced it was closing. An estimated 1,500 jobs will be cut. At one time, the plant employed about 3,000 people. It is one of hundreds that have been torn down or abandoned in the past two decades.

A common perception is that the United States can't compete with China because its labor costs are lower and its regulations to protect workers and the environment are weaker. In fact, U.S. companies are competing on a wildly unlevel playing field.

China's domestic generic-drug companies are heavily subsidized by the Chinese government. Its industrial policy has been to invest billions of dollars in drug manufacturing so it can achieve its aim to become the pharmacy to the world.

U.S. and other Western companies are not competing with Chinese companies. They are competing with the Chinese government.

As COVID-19 began to spread and demand for generic drugs skyrocketed, supply dried up. Wuhan, China, is a drug manufacturing hub, and it was shut down.

At least 70 countries, including the United Kingdom and half of the countries in the European Union, banned exports of essential drugs and supplies to keep them for their own people. For example, Italy banned propofol, a sedative administered to people hospitalized with the virus and on ventilators.

Our national respository of essential drugs and medical supplies, the Strategic National Stockpile, was never designed to stockpile enough products to supply the entire U.S. health-care system. It was established to respond to local public-health emergencies, such as Hurricane Sandy. Also, stockpiles don't work in a pandemic when they have to be replenished with medicines made in other countries.

Domestic production of essential generics and the components to make them is the only solution to ensure the United States has the medicines it needs when it needs them.

Last August, President Donald Trump signed an executive order calling for reduced dependence on foreign manufacturers for essential drugs and their critical inputs. The order requires the Department of Health and Human Services, the Department of Defense and VA to prioritize the purchase of essential generic drugs produced in the United States. It also directs them to sign long-term contracts with domestic companies. This provision gives manufacturers the certainty needed to invest in facilities and strengthen the industrial base.

In this way, U.S. taxpayer dollars will support good-paying jobs at home rather than help China gain more geopolitical leverage.

In Congress, more than 50 bills have been introduced to lessen or end U.S. dependence on China and other countries for essential drugs. Some would require DoD to prioritize procurement of U.S.-made generic drugs.

Drug safety job No. 1 In early 2020, the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) recalled all its drug manufacturing facility inspectors around the world to protect them from the COVID-19 pandemic. FDA inspections are the foundation of its regulatory authority to protect the public from unsafe drugs. Highly trained inspectors may spend up to two

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> **In a triumph of science, industry and government, penicillin was mass-produced in time for the D-Day landings at Normandy Beach in France. Similar partnerships are needed today.**

weeks in a plant to assure a manufacturer meets strict U.S. standards.

The future of FDA inspections in China remains in jeopardy. In addition, the State Department advised Americans traveling to China that they could be detained and barred from exiting the country. Without these inspections, the United States is, in effect, continuing to import unregulated medicines. This dramatically escalates the risks to the safety and security of the nation's drug supply.

In July 2018, more than 31,000 active-duty U.S. military personnel, veterans and their family members were among the millions of Americans notified they may have been sold blood-pressure medicines containing a carcinogen once used to make rocket fuel. A manufacturer in China was the worst offender. Its product had more than 200 times the acceptable amount of the carcinogen per pill. Company employees knew their product didn't meet U.S. standards but sold it anyway.

A decade earlier, hundreds of Americans died from a lethal contaminant in a commonly used blood thinner in hospitals, heparin, that came from China. The FDA discovered that a cheap fake substitute had been used instead of the more expensive authentic product in an economically motivated scheme.

Cost of U.S.-made generic drugs A common perception is that U.S.-made essential generic drugs will cost more. This isn't necessarily true.

I spoke with a pharmaceutical executive who had more than 35 years of experience building and operating manufacturing plants. He told the story of his visit to a local pharmacy to refill a 90-day supply of a common generic blood-pressure medicine. The price was $157.50.

During our conversation, he asked, "How much do you think the manufacturer would be paid?" I guessed $20. In fact, the manufacturer was paid $1. Where does the other $156.50 go? To middlemen who hammer down on manufacturers to keep more margin for themselves.

Innovation in drug manufacturing can lower the cost of production. Drugs are usually made in batches. Advanced manufacturing uses a continuous process that can produce medicines faster and up to 30 percent cheaper.

Innovations in manufacturing also allow for 100 percent made-in-America essential generic medicines. With real-time quality control, the FDA doesn't have to send federal inspectors around the world to ensure medicines are made according to U.S. standards. Also, strategic partnerships between the federal government and industry are necessary to ensure a domestic industrial base that can produce generic drugs essential for life and the nation's survival.

More than 75 years ago, in a triumph of science, industry and government, penicillin was mass-produced in time for the D-Day landings at Normandy Beach in France. U.S. manufacturing supplied 90 percent of the penicillin that went ashore with Allied forces. Similar partnerships are needed today.

On Oct. 30, the FDA released a list of 227 essential generic medicines necessary for the U.S. health-care system to function in the best of times and during a natural disaster or global pandemic. This list is the first step to self-sufficiency, because it prioritizes products that should be made in the United States.

As the COVID-19 pandemic worsens, it has become clear the United States is ill-prepared to take care of its own people when they are sick.

The risks are an equal-opportunity event: members of Congress, business leaders, senior federal government officials – all Americans – bet their lives that the pills they need to save their lives will be there when they need them, and will work as they should.

Let's hope that wise minds prevail and our nation fixes this very fixable problem. We need to get started now. We don't have time to wait.

Rosemary Gibson is senior adviser at the Hastings Center.

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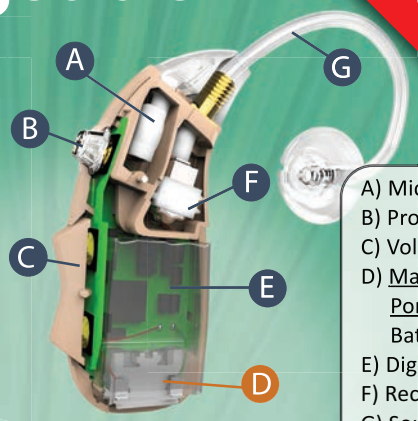

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Task Group 58.3 departs Ulithi on Feb. 10, 1945. Seen from USS Bunker Hill *are USS* Cowpens, *left, and USS* Essex, *center. A planned U.S.-led invasion of Japan would have included as many as 42 aircraft carriers.* Wikimedia Commons

The invasion that never was

Later united by family, a U.S. soldier and Japanese woman share their perspectives on Operation Downfall.

BY RON BASSO

Operation Downfall was set to begin Nov. 1, 1945, with a massive invasion of Kyushu, the southernmost of Japan's four largest islands. Led by Gen. Douglas MacArthur, supreme allied commander of the Southwest Pacific Area, more than 550,000 members of the U.S. Armed Forces would have participated – a force three times larger than that at Normandy – in what was anticipated to be the bloodiest battle of the war.

The planned invasion was canceled after the United States dropped atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki on Aug. 6 and 9, leading to Japan's surrender and the war's end. In the decades since, historians and other experts have debated the necessity of such a brutal tool of war and the ethics of President Truman's decision.

Thanks to an oral history project, I have a personal, boots-on-the-ground account of this crucial moment, seen through the eyes of my late father, Rudy Basso, a U.S. soldier, and my mother-in-law, Shizuko Nomoto, a Japanese civilian. Conducted in 1999, the following interview records their feelings and impressions during the final months of World War II.

Shizuko's hometown of Tonda was 220 miles northeast of the proposed Allied landing point in Kyushu. As a member of Japan's millions-strong civilian defense force, she had been trained to defend her homeland at all costs. Meanwhile, Rudy's regiment shipped out from the Philippines and waited offshore for the seaborne invasion, codenamed Operation Olympic, to begin. His unit's instructions were to fight northward.

Both were prepared and trained to kill their enemies, if necessary. It wouldn't be until a half-century later, as in-laws, that Shizuko and Rudy realized how close they came to crossing paths as combatants on opposite sides of the war.

The last "atomic veteran" in his company, Rudy died in 2007.

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How did you celebrate New Year's Day 1945?

Shizuko: Though the war was continuing, I made a resolution to stay healthy and find a Japanese husband. The emperor had decreed all of Japan would fight to the last man. This brought great comfort and a national resolve that made me feel very secure. Being 18, I was too young to think about dying but old enough to be willing to fight for the emperor and my homeland.

Rudy: I was completing tank training school at Fort Knox. All of us were more concerned about being well-trained than anything else. Along with tanks, we learned bazookas, flamethrowers, mortars and the M-l rifle. I was an expert in the rifle and felt, with the war winding down in Germany, I'd probably be sent to the South Pacific.

Rudy Basso

Shizuko Nomoto

Describe your lives as spring approached.

Shizuko: I was in my last year of high school, and graduation ceremonies were coming in March. We had been studying hard, everything from English to algebra to geography. In physical education class, we learned the *naganita* (bamboo staff with knife). It was part of our culture but also necessary for homeland defense. The boys learned kendo. They were going to let us graduate a year early so we could help in the factories.

Rudy: By March, I had finished tank training, and my orders had come in. I was sent to the Philippines and assigned to the 41st Infantry Division, 186th Regiment. Once there, I was assigned to a mortar group. I remember it being unbelievably hot and humid. We spent our days in the mountains on recon operations. The Japanese had taken to the hills. My team was charged with checking caves and ensuring they didn't come back into the area.

And your feelings about the war?

Shizuko: I felt secure knowing that everyone would fight. I was looking forward to attending a dressmaking school in Tokyo in the fall. Though we were at war, I still had plans for the future. The Japanese navy had put three cannons in an area near our house to defend the coast. I was not scared. I knew the Americans were bad. We had attacked them because they were helping the Chinese.

Rudy: The general feeling among all the soldiers was that we were invincible – not because we were cocky, but because we knew we had the greater firepower and best training. We didn't want to die; we felt the Japanese didn't seem to care. Our concerns shifted from not being scared of the war so much as to doing our job right ... being well-prepared.

How much did you think about your future and your loved ones?

Shizuko: Our house was very busy. Graduation was over, and I was now working in the soda factory in Tonda. I had been accepted at the Sugino Girls Dressmaking College in Tokyo. I was very excited about that. Sadly, my grandfather died of pneumonia in April. But my mother had fled Tokyo to come live with my sisters, grandmother and me. It was good having her home.

Rudy: I wrote my mom that everything was fine. I was 19 at the time, and she was worried. I also wrote my older brother, who I had heard was north of me fighting on some island. Recon operations were going as scheduled, but really, every day blurred into the next. Our only contact with the outside world was the company bulletins nailed to a coconut tree. We'd read bits and pieces of news, but between recon missions, eating and trying to stay cool, you didn't think about anything else.

How did you react to Germany's surrender?

Shizuko: Even though I collected pictures of Hollywood stars for my room, the bad people were the Americans, the English and the Australians. I was sad that Germany surrendered. On a trip to Tokuyama, I met Japanese soldiers coming back from fighting in China. Even though they had been at war, they were very polite and helpful to all the women and children on the train.

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Rudy: It seemed a big weight had been lifted. But after everything settled down, we all knew it was our turn. We were destined to invade Japan. That was very sobering.

The fall of Okinawa happened in July. How did you hear about it?

Shizuko: It was not announced on the radio, yet somehow people knew and shared what information they had. It was very sad, especially to the older people of the village. Many began to talk about what would happen next – not if, but when, the Americans would come to our town.

Rudy: I heard about it from the coconut tree. I thought about my brother who was near there somewhere. I figured if he could take care of me growing up, he certainly could take care of himself in battle. As the days passed, we heard a lot of GIs died taking that island. If the Japanese fought like this on land that wasn't theirs, what was it going to be like fighting them in their own backyards?

Japan rejected the Potsdam Treaty on July 29 and was being routinely bombed, some said, to soften it for the invasion. What were your thoughts, Shizuko, about the bombing and yours, Rudy, about an invasion?

Shizuko: During daytime bombing raids, the sirens would go off, and my family and I would hide in the house. Night was different. You couldn't see the planes, and we felt the planes couldn't see us. So I'd climb on the roof of my house and watch. Tokuyama was 12 miles away and was bombed a lot. We called the Americans Yankees. I had never seen one up close but knew we'd have to kill them or die if they came.

Rudy: The scuttlebutt from Okinawa was that a lot of guys would die invading Japan. It would make D-Day look like a walk in the park. Because the Japanese never surrendered, we knew once we invaded it was going to be a battle to end all battles. We planned to shoot to kill, use bayonets once we ran out of ammo, use our guns as clubs, and then go hand-to-hand. We were told there were over 500,000 men ready to invade but that only two-thirds of us would make it to shore. Of that, only a third would make it inland. We were to fight knowing that reinforcements would eventually come. Of the inland force, one of every two soldiers would survive, if the estimates of the Japanese force were accurate that month. If wrong, we would have walked into a bloodbath. (The estimates were 50 percent lower than the actual number.)

The United States dropped two atomic bombs, one on Hiroshima, the other on Nagasaki. What was your reaction?

Shizuko: We heard it was horrible. People had once talked about buildings being bombed before and what was left to rebuild, but this bomb turned buildings into dust. This was very scary. Many people thought Japan should surrender to keep this from happening to the rest of us, but we knew the military would not stand for that. We had resigned ourselves to fight and die, if necessary.

Rudy: Not being there yet, I had no idea about its effects. The announcement on the coconut tree was that Truman had dropped a bomb with the equivalent destructive power of 22,000 tons of TNT and that there was a lot of damage. It wasn't until later that I saw firsthand the destruction. But destruction is not a proper description. Obliteration and utter ruin would better define it.

Peace talks resumed between Japan and the Allied powers, but on Aug. 12, Japan rejected all overtures and bombing runs resumed. The unsuccessful coup d'etat by the Japanese generals Aug. 14 allowed the emperor to announce Japan's surrender on the radio at 9 a.m. Aug. 15. Where were you at that time?

Shizuko: We had heard on the 14th that there would be some announcement about the war the next day. We did not know whether it would be the generals declaring that we would fight to the death or the emperor announcing surrender. When the emperor's voice came on, we knew what he would say and everyone started crying. We were all sad that Japan had lost but glad the war was over.

Rudy: I was on guard duty when I heard rifle shots coming from our encampment. Thinking the Japanese had attacked, I ran down to join the fight. When I got there, everyone was laughing and shouting and firing their guns in the air. The war was over! I felt great, just great.

With Operation Downfall canceled, your paths indirectly crossed in Hiroshima. Before that, though, describe your impressions of Hiroshima when you were there?

Shizuko: I was on a train traveling from my home in Tonda to Tokyo. I had taken this train many times over the years with my sisters and mother and by myself. We always enjoyed stopping in Hiroshima because of its many shops and people. As the train approached the station house, we were all told to not get out when it stopped, that the air in Hiroshima was poison.

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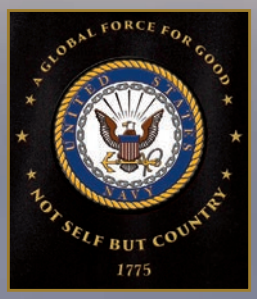

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Rudy: As we sailed to Hiroshima, we were now an occupying force, not an invading one. I was in B Company, so we set up camp about five miles from ground zero. Our job was to prohibit American troops into what was left of the city and travel daily to Kuri, about three hours away, to disarm Japanese troops coming back from overseas.

What happened next?

Shizuko: When we stopped at the Hiroshima train station, no one was there to get on the train. All that was left of the station was one tall burnt piece of twisted metal. There was nothing as far as you could see – no signs, no shops, no birds, no animals, nothing. I snuck off the train and stood on what used to be the platform. It was the only time I have ever been scared during the day.

Rudy: It was as if all life had been sucked out of the city. There were no sounds – no trees, no insects, no birds, no people or buildings, not even echoes. We had brought some scientists in with us. They stayed a few days, but then we didn't see them anymore. I could not believe the magnitude of the devastation around me. We camped there for three months before we left.

With the war over, what were your plans and hopes for the immediate future?

Shizuko: The original dressmaking school had been destroyed in the bombing of Tokyo, and we were having classes in a makeshift wooden building on the outskirts of the city. By now I was living with my mom in Tokyo. She had returned to the capital and started her bakery again. College was hard, but life was returning to normal.

Rudy: The 41st would be deactivated in December, and we would be reassigned to a unit near Osaka. Damage by the B-29s to this city and surrounding towns was extensive. After the locals realized we weren't going to kill them but were there to help, I felt things changed a lot for the better.

What did you find out about each other's culture that you didn't know before the war?

Shizuko: American soldiers were nice people. I had never seen up close a person with round eyes and such pale skin. Americans were very helpful, along with their general (MacArthur), in helping us rebuild. This we thanked them for very much. It made recovering from war bearable and hopeful.

Rudy: The Japanese were polite, industrious, energetic people. Everyone worked hard for the common good. Up to this time, I knew them only as ferocious in battle. Once their country was relieved of their crazy generals, I felt these same traits would be channeled in a constructive way. This would allow them to rebuild quickly.

Moving closer to the present, you are now in-laws, with a son and daughter who married in 1974. Rudy's division was scheduled to invade and possibly move up to take over Shizuko's hometown in the south of Japan. What were your thoughts when you found out you could have met as combatants?

Shizuko: We were instructed to defend our land, homes and people, everyone to the last person. The generals had said this on the radio, and though none of us wanted to fight, together we felt we would inflict many casualties on the Yankees before we died. That was our duty to our country.

Rudy: World War II would have been a different war if Japan hadn't surrendered and had forced us to invade. We had a difficult time with Japanese soldiers in the Philippines and especially in Okinawa. They didn't surrender. Then, the nation didn't believe that collateral damage should be a concern during war. So to us, fighting civilians trained to kill us was something we accepted.

Anything else you want to share?

Shizuko: Japan is a strong country today, stronger than it was before the war. Many of my friends married and eventually came to America to live. My blood is joined to this country through my children and grandchildren. I am now a citizen of this country. It was the proudest time of my life. You know, it's common people who usually do all the fighting in war. I think all governments should work hard at peace. If they do, wars will not exist.

Rudy: I'm glad we bombed Japan and forced them to surrender. Estimates are that more than a million U.S. soldiers would have died to take Japan. Japan would have lost 5 million to 6 million soldiers and civilians if we had invaded. ... Truman spared the world a gruesome, horrible chapter in history. Can you imagine 7 million or 8 million people dying in a single battle? Morally, you have to avoid it. The Pacific Ocean would have been red with our blood, everyone's blood. If he hadn't pushed to end the war quickly, I may not be here. Shizuko may not have been here either. Our children would not have been born. Think about the future generations that exist today because of America's determination to win the war.

Ron Basso is an Army veteran and member of American Legion Post 110 in Virginia Beach, Va.

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'Nucleus of veteran activity'

Where history was made in the first quarter century of The American Legion, a new future is unfolding.

BY KIRSTEN CLARK

Photo courtesy Kirsten Clark

On March 15, 1919, members of the American Expeditionary Force convened in Paris to form The American Legion. This historic event marked the start of an organization dedicated to creating and fighting for veteran benefits, resources and programs, while beginning a legacy of care for veterans in the state of Indiana, across the United States and beyond, that would continue for over a century.

The group's war-weary veterans conducted their first convention in November 1919 in Minneapolis. They adopted a constitution and preamble and voted to establish a permanent national headquarters in Indianapolis. With more than 170 trains in and out of the Circle City on a daily basis, Indianapolis provided the ideal location for state and foreign department leaders to meet and create programs that would change the lives of American veterans and their families forever. With the location chosen, the new veteran group soon needed four walls and a roof.

In 1924, the state began construction at 777 N. Meridian St., on property designated by city planners for a Memorial Mall.

"A special Indiana legislative session in 1920 designated two downtown Indianapolis city blocks on state property and funneled $2.2 million to construct what is now the Memorial Mall," said J. Stewart Goodwin, Indiana War Memorial executive director and retired Air Force brigadier general. "Building 777 was the first structure conceived on the state land and would become the Legion's home."

City planners initially sought to use the property to honor the nearly 135,000 Indiana veterans and 3,709 killed in action during World War I. So in 1931, the American Legion Mall was developed behind Building 777. It features a sunken garden with a cenotaph and four Art Deco columns topped with stylized golden eagles. It stands today in tribute to the Indiana veterans who gave their lives in World War I.

"Indianapolis has more memorials and space dedicated to our servicemembers and veterans than any other city in America except Washington, D.C.," Goodwin said. "This area does serve as the World War I tribute city planners had intended."

After construction was complete at 777 North Meridian in 1925, The American Legion took up residence in the iconic four-story, 40,000-square-foot structure. The American Legion Auxiliary began operating from Building 777 in the years that followed. The location was so successful that by 1950, The American Legion had outgrown the building and moved to a new, larger location across the mall at 700 N. Pennsylvania St.

"We are now in a position to put this historic site back to work in a way that will provide tremendous benefit to veterans, their family members and caregivers," said Dennis Wimer, Indiana Department of Veterans Affairs director. "The vision we have is to make Building 777 the nucleus of veteran activity, resources and accessibility in Indiana. Veterans will be able to access the help and resources they need in one location, one trip, one stop."

The distinctive building needed a transformation before it could be made into the Indiana Veterans Center. The vision was to preserve all the detail of its 1920s charm and architecture while adding features to include updated ramps compliant with the Americans with Disabilities Act, new elevators and restrooms on each floor. Renovations also incorporated other high-tech capabilities and modern amenities. With

CONTINUED ON **PAGE 44**

Photo by Ben Mikesell

Building 777's new tenants

- Indiana Department of Veterans Affairs
- American Legion Department of Indiana
- Disabled American Veterans
- Operation Job Ready Vets
- Volunteers of America of Indiana and Ohio
- INVets
- VA's HUD/VASH Program
- Welcome Home Vietnam Veterans
- Veterans of Foreign Wars

Photo by Ben Mikesell

- **Take a virtual tour –** The Indiana Department of Veterans Affairs and American Legion National Headquarters have developed a video tour of the newly restored and modernized building at 777 North Meridian in Indianapolis. The State of Indiana respectfully refurbished the historic interior design, including restoration of the original National Executive Committee desks, in the four-story Indiana Veterans Center.

legion.org/magazine/videos

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American Legion Archives

"Building 777 was the first structure conceived on the state land and would become the Legion's home."

Retired Brig. Gen. J. Stewart Goodwin, Indiana War Memorial executive director

CONTINUED FROM **PAGE 42**

renovation complete, all divisions of the Indiana Department of Veterans Affairs have now relocated from the Indiana Government Center to the third floor of 777 North Meridian. IDVA divisions include the State Approving Agency (SAA), the Military Family Relief Fund, State Veteran Service Officers, Training and Services, Legal and Legislative, and Communications and Outreach. The central location also serves as a hub for the state's six district service officers and veteran representatives from the Indiana Department of Workforce Development.

In the early days of American Legion presence in Building 777, the Servicemen's Readjustment Act of 1944, commonly known as the GI Bill of Rights, began its journey to completion. Through the GI Bill, signed into law in June 1944, a determined American Legion sought better benefits for men and women returning to civilian life after World War II, through education and training, home loans, farm and business financing, and more. Nearly 9 million veterans would take advantage of the GI Bill between 1944 and 1949, followed by millions more in the decades ahead. Many other veteran benefits and resources now offered by the Department of Veterans Affairs began with ideas from leaders who met and worked in Building 777.

Additional veteran agencies following IDVA to the Indiana Veterans Center are the Hoosier Veterans Assistance Foundation (HVAF), INVets, and representatives from Disabled American Veterans and Veterans of Foreign Wars. The location will also assist veterans with their medical and health-care enrollment and other federal benefits, as part of the Department of Housing and Urban Development-VA Supportive Housing Program (HUD-VASH). HUD-VASH is a collaborative program between HUD and VA which combines HUD housing vouchers with VA supportive services to help veterans and their families who are homeless find and sustain permanent housing. Representatives from the federal regional office are on hand to assist veterans in acquiring VA benefits and services.

"No other state that we know of will offer all of these services under one roof," Goodwin said. "Since the Vietnam War, every veteran is a volunteer; they raised their hands and took an oath to protect and defend others. It is our responsibility to take care of those who took care of us."

Building 777 also has improved technology access and increased space for training, staff meetings and conferences. Veterans are able to use computers and the internet to access digital and electronic records with assistance from staff. The fourth floor features an auditorium with the original restored hand-carved wood wainscoting and wall panels, as well as additional office workspace that can be leased for designated periods of time through the Indiana Department of Administration.

"The Indiana Veterans Center is a veteran's first and last stop," Wimer said. "If you are a veteran or veteran family member looking for assistance, you can come here, and we will do our best to meet your needs. Our goal is to serve Indiana's veterans in the best possible way, and I know we can do that at the Indiana Veterans Center."

Kirsten Clark, a retired Air Force staff sergeant and member of American Legion Post 426 in Pittsboro, Ind., is media manager, Outreach Division, Indiana Department of Veterans Affairs.

American Legion Archives

"We are now in a position to put this historic site back to work in a way that will provide tremendous benefit to veterans, their family members and caregivers."

Dennis Wimer, Indiana Department of Veterans Affairs director

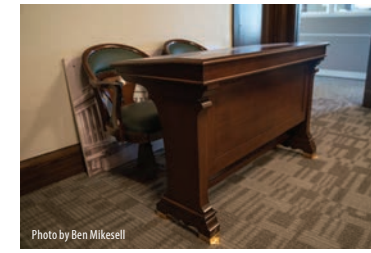


Photo by Ben Mikesell

Original NEC desks are restored and on display.

Jackpot! Hoard of 1883-O Morgan Silver Dollars Found & Secured

138 Years Old (Just $0.72 Per Year!)

Mintage accounts for only 1.33% of all Morgan Silver Dollars Struck!

Actual size is 38.1 mm

- ✓ Historic Morgan Silver Dollars
- ✓ Minted in New Orleans
- ✓ 1883 date
- ✓ 138 years old
- ✓ 26.73 grams of 90% fine silver
- ✓ Hefty 38.1 mm diameter
- ✓ Certified collector Mint State-63 (MS63) condition by NGC/PCGS
- ✓ Sealed in protective holder
- ✓ 1883-O accounts for just 1.33% of all Morgans Struck

The Morgan Silver Dollar is the most popular and iconic vintage U.S. coin. They were the Silver Dollars of the Wild West, going on countless untold adventures in dusty saddlebags across the nation. Finding a hoard of Morgans doesn't happen often—and when it does, it's a *big deal*. So when we came across a recent hoard of 710 Morgan Silver Dollars—all struck at the historic New Orleans Mint in 1883—it was like hitting the jackpot!

Morgans from the New Orleans Mint

In 1859, Nevada's Comstock Lode was discovered, and soon its rich silver ore made its way across the nation, including to the fabled New Orleans Mint, the only U.S. Mint branch to have served under the U.S. government, the State of Louisiana and the Confederacy. In 1883, some of that silver was struck into Morgan Silver Dollars, each featuring the mint's iconic "O" mint mark. Now you have the chance to add these historic, 90% pure U.S. silver coins to your collection!

Scarce 1883-O Date

The Morgan Silver Dollar was struck from 1878 to 1904, and again in 1921. In the 100 years since, most of these beautiful U.S. Silver Dollars have been worn out or melted down for their silver. It's estimated that as little as 15% of all Morgans struck exist today in any condition. Even fewer come from this particular mintage.

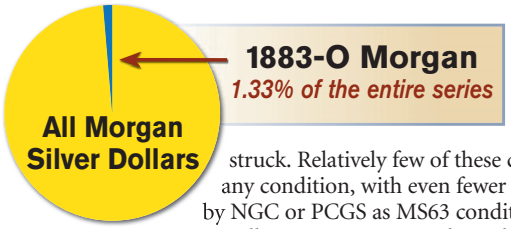
Here's the breakdown: in 1883, just 4.33% of the total Morgan series was struck. Less than a third of those coins came from New Orleans. In the end, the 1883-O Morgan Silver Dollar accounts for just 1.33% of the entire series—and that's *before* the mass meltings that have left so few coins for collectors to secure. And we can expect that even fewer of the survivors are of collector grade...

Certified Collector Quality

Coins are graded on a 70-point scale, with a 70 representing perfection. Through hard work and diligence, the collector who first assembled this hoard managed to find 1883-O Morgans graded as quality Mint State-63 (MS63) condition by the world's two leading third-party grading services, Numismatic Guaranty Corporation (NGC) or Professional Coin Grading Service (PCGS)! Grading service varies. The condition of these coins are as though they were struck yesterday, despite circulating in commerce more than 135 years ago! And yet they have survived with a quality level of eye appeal that won't cost you an arm and a leg.

Don't Miss This Opportunity—Order Now!

Look elsewhere and you'll find 1883-O Morgans in the same MS63 graded condition selling for as much as $159. But you won't pay that here. For this special offer, we're offering these collector-grade, 1883-O Morgan Silver Dollars for just $99 per coin. That's 138 years of American history for just 72 cents per year!



The 1883-O Morgan Silver Dollar accounts for just 1.33% of all Morgans struck. Relatively few of these coins still exist in any condition, with even fewer Morgans certified by NGC or PCGS as MS63 condition. Don't miss out. Call 1-888-324-9125 and use the special offer code below to secure yours today while our limited supply lasts!

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VERBATIM

We can see each other not as adversaries but as neighbors. We can treat each other with dignity and respect. We can join forces, stop the shouting, and lower the temperature. ... This is our historic moment of crisis and challenge, and unity is the path forward. And we must meet this moment as the United States of America.

President Joe Biden, speaking at his inauguration as the 46th president of the United States outside the U.S. Capitol on Jan. 20

Getty

HONOR & REMEMBRANCE

Congress finally recognizes Chinese-American veterans

AP

Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi recently joined with other congressional leaders to honor Chinese-American veterans of World War II with the Congressional Gold Medal.

"Despite decades of systemic racism, discrimination and xenophobia, as many as 20,000 Chinese-Americans bravely answered the call to serve to defeat tyranny and to safeguard freedom for all," Pelosi said, adding that many served in spite of laws that barred Chinese immigrants from attaining U.S. citizenship. "Still, in the face of this injustice, approximately 8,000 Chinese immigrants who were denied their rights proudly served ... Wherever they served, their heroism helped secure victory for the Allies and advance the promise of liberty for people around the world."

In what she called a "celebration of courage and patriotism," Pelosi noted that fewer than 300 Chinese-American World War II veterans remain. "We pay tribute to our Chinese-American veterans not only as defenders of democracy, but as an inseparable part of the fabric of our country."

Elsie Chin Yuen Seetoo, a 102-year-old veteran of the Army Nurses Corps, accepted the honor on behalf of fellow Chinese-American veterans.

CAPITOL HILL

Prepping for war

If there's any doubt about the objectives of those who spearheaded the Jan. 6 assault on the Capitol that left five people dead and more than 110 police officers injured, consider what the insurrectionists were wearing and wielding: helmets, body armor, flex cuffs, handguns, electrical-pulse tasers, bear spray, lead pipes, brass knuckles, knives, spears, baseball bats, wrenches, semiautomatic weapons and Molotov cocktails.

Plus, not far from the Capitol, pipe bombs were discovered outside the offices of the Republican National Committee and Democratic National Committee. A truck parked across the street from the RNC and DNC offices "contained rifles and shotguns and a mass of ammunition," as *The Washington Post* reported, citing federal law-enforcement agents. Also discovered near the Capitol were jars filled with homemade napalm, according to arrest warrants.

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MEDIA

'A huge call to action'

Lawrence Montreuil

The American Legion's legislative achievements are directly related to the advocacy work from its 1.8 million members. That was among the takeaways from American Legion Legislative Director Lawrence Montreuil's appearance on a recent Tango Alpha Lima podcast.

Montreuil, who deployed with the Marines and continues to serve in the Marine Corps Reserve, explained how members can get involved in legislative activity. Among those are participating in Action Alerts.

Throughout the year, there are urgent calls to mobilize around particular pieces of legislation. A Commander's Message email blast outlines each bill and allows American Legion Family members to use the Action Alert to contact their lawmakers to support the legislation.

Montreuil said lawmakers do take action when there is large support expressed for a particular bill. "That is the key and the quantitative method of how elected officials can see that veterans care about this issue," he said.

Tango Alpha Lima co-host Ashley Gorbulja-Maldonado emphasized how easy it is for Legionnaires to support these efforts.

"When we are talking about getting involved and gaining an understanding of these new folks we've elected into office, it's so important that The American Legion has made it incredibly simple for you to get involved and act upon our legislative agenda," she said. "This is a huge call to action. We know you care. And we want to have your voices heard."

Montreuil covered other topics, including the Legion's priorities for the 117th Congress: toxic exposure, improving health care for women veterans, telehealth and rural health.

Tango Alpha Lima, which debuted in April 2020, is hosted by Mark Seavey, Jeff Daly and Gorbulja-Maldonado. Episodes are released by 9 a.m. Eastern time each Tuesday.

– Henry Howard

To receive Action Alerts through the Commander's Message, subscribe at **legion.org/newsletters**.

THE LIFE OF A DOUBLE AGENT

There are about 40 Tango Alpha Lima episodes in both audio and video formats, available at **legion.org/tangoalphalima**. Guests have shared stories about their military service, how they continue to serve veterans and more.

Naveed Jamali, an American Legion member and Navy veteran, worked as a spy for the FBI for three years, secretly obtaining information from the Russians. He shared his compelling story in the Feb. 2 episode. "It was intense," he recalls. "There were a lot of moments, just like in the military or raising kids or in your day-to-day job, you plan and immediately things go wrong. Part of the challenge is not to just execute a plan, but being able to adapt in the moment and overcome."

Naveed Jamali

ACTIVE DUTY

Marines gear up on Guam

The Marine Corps has activated a new base on the island of Guam: Camp Blaz. As Military.com reports, it's the first new Marine installation since the commissioning of a base in Georgia in 1952.

Named in honor of Marine Brig. Gen. Vicente "Ben" Tomas Garrido Blaz (a native of Guam), the new base will be home to 1,300 Marines permanently stationed on the island and another 3,700 Marines who will rotate through the island. Featuring a multipurpose machine-gun range and an urban training compound, the base "will play an essential role in strengthening the Department of Defense's ability to deter and defend," according to a statement released by the Marine Corps.

SOCIETY

Ripples of kindness

Ice-cream lovers in the town of Brainerd, Minn., recently took the phrase "pay it forward" to an entirely new level.

As CNN reports, "a random act of kindness from one man paying for the car behind him in a Dairy Queen drive-thru resulted in over 900 cars also taking part in the pay-it-forward chain."

Tina Jensen, the DQ store manager, said a man came by the drive-thru window and asked if he could pay for his meal and for the car behind him, which is not an unusual occurrence in Brainerd.

Most of the time it lasts for about 15 cars and a couple of hours. "This time, the chain continued for two and a half days, with over 900 cars participating, raking in $10,000 in sales," according to CNN.

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Photo by Ben Mikesell

NATIONAL CONVENTION

Color guard, band contests set for Phoenix

American Legion color guard units are gearing up for this year's National Color Guard Contest, which will open the 102nd National Convention on Aug 27. The contest will start at 4 p.m. in the Phoenix Convention Center, North Building, Exhibition Hall B-E, 300 Level, with Harrisburg Post 472 of Houston defending its title as champion.

The next day, Aug 28, the American Legion National Concert Band Contest will kick off at 1 p.m. in the Phoenix Convention Center, West Building, Symphony Hall, 100 Level.

For contest applications, go to **legion.org/convention/contests**.

EXHIBIT HALL

This year's exhibit hall will be located in the Phoenix Convention Center's North Building, Exhibition Hall 1-3, Lower Level. There, convention-goers will find local food, apparel and souvenirs, as well as life-care items, insurance companies, promotional products and other vendors. Emblem Sales will also have an on-site store.

Those looking for more Legion Family training are encouraged to stop by the Subject Matter Experts stage on Aug. 28 and Aug. 30.

Exhibit Hall show hours are Friday, Aug. 27, 8 a.m. to 3:30 p.m.; Saturday, Aug. 28, 8 a.m. to 3:30 p.m.; Sunday, Aug. 29, 8 a.m. to 2 p.m.; Monday, Aug. 30, 8 a.m. to 3:30 p.m.; and Tuesday, Aug. 31, 8 a.m. to 2 p.m.

For more information on the exhibit hall, or to reserve booth space, email **convention@legion.org**.

HOTEL LISTING CORRECTION

The Department of Tennessee will stay at the Residence Inn at 132 S. Central Ave., Phoenix, during the convention.

EDUCATION

Vet Tech enrollment

Q: *I am interested in attending school in my home state of Illinois to earn a certificate in computer software. My buddy told me about the Vet Tech Program. Since I only have three days left of my Post-9/11 GI Bill benefits, will I be able to receive that certificate in the program? And will I have to pay the tuition and fees up front?*

A: The Vet Tech Program is an innovative curriculum that pairs veterans with high-demand industry-leading training and helps them acquire new skills to enter the job market. To submit an application, you must have at least one day of unexpired GI Bill benefits remaining. The Vet Tech Program will pay for tuition in different increments. When you enroll and attend your first day, VA will pay 25 percent of your tuition and another 25 percent when you complete the catalog requirements. VA will pay the 50 percent tuition remaining balance when you have secured a position. The training facilities and VA work closely to assist in finding employment in your career field.

Valerie Heffner is a Marine Corps veteran and member of American Legion Post 27 in Apache Junction, Ariz.

askvalerie@legion.org

LEADERSHIP

New department commanders

The following four department commanders should have been included in the January issue's photos of the organization's 2020-2021 leadership.

OKLAHOMA
Donald C. Roane

PHILIPPINES
William Wight

PUERTO RICO
Antonio Arroyo

VIRGINIA
William S. Feasenmyer Jr.

MEMBERSHIP

NEW POSTS

Post 420, Mission Viejo, Calif. Chartered Nov. 24 (15 members)

Raber-Del Toro Post 717, Westminster, Calif. Chartered Nov. 24 (15 members)

Sun City Post 228, Georgetown, Texas Chartered Nov. 24 (15 members)

Advertisement

Weird Herb Shocks Doctors With Relief of Leg and Feet Pain, Burning, Tingling, Numbness

6 clinical studies show it is effective. Lost but now re-discovered. Thousands of new users report amazing relief from leg and feet problems in just 30 to 90 days – with no side effects. Available in all 50 states without a prescription.

RE-DISCOVERED LEG AND FEET PROBLEM SOLUTION: *In Greece in the 1600s, this herb was originally called "horse herb" because it was fed to horses with ailing legs. It has now been re-discovered and is giving soothing comfort to Americans who have leg and feet pain, burning, tingling and numbness.*

A re-discovery from the 1600s is causing a frenzy within the medical system. A weird herb has been shown in six clinical studies (and by thousands of users) to be very effective for leg and feet pain, burning and numbness – with no side effects – at low cost – and with no doctor visit or prescription needed.

This weird herb comes from a 12-foot tall tree that grows in Greece and other countries in Europe. In the old days, people noticed that when their horses who had leg and feet problems ate this herb – it was almost like magic how quickly their problems got much better. They called it the "horse herb". Then somehow with Europe's ongoing wars, this herbal secret got lost in time.

"It works for people who've tried many other treatments before with little or no success. Other doctors and I are shocked at how effective it is. It has created a lot of excitement" says Dr. Ryan Shelton, M.D.

Its active ingredient has been put into pill form and improved. It is being offered in the United States under the brand name Neuroflo.

WHY ALL THIS EXCITEMENT?

Researchers have found an herb originally from Greece that has been shown in six placebo-controlled medical studies (543 participants) to be effective and safe. This natural compound strengthens blood vessel walls and reduces swelling to stop the pain and suffering.

Poor blood flow in the legs and feet is one of the common problems that develops as we age. Millions of Americans suffer from neuropathy and chronic venous insufficiency (CVI), edema, and other leg/feet problems – millions have these but are undiagnosed.

Today's treatments don't work for a high percentage of people – and they have side effects that make them hard to tolerate or that people do not want to risk. This includes prescription drugs, over the counter pain pills, surgery and compression.

Already popular in Europe, this natural herb *(horse chestnut seed extract)* is taking America by storm since it was announced last week.

HOW IT WORKS

Here's why you have pain now: Your arteries have weakened. Your arteries can't carry enough blood, nutrients and oxygen down to your legs and feet. This damages your nerves and causes your burning, tingling and numbness.

The herbs in the pill Neuroflo strengthen your arteries that carry blood, nutrients and oxygen to your feet and legs. It improves your circulation so oxygenated blood goes to the nerves and repairs them. This makes your nerves grow stronger so your pain fades away and your legs and feet feel much younger again.

Until now, scientists could not combine these herbs into one pill without losing their full potency, but finally, they have succeeded.

Katerina King from Murrieta, California says, "I had hands and feet tingling and snapping and burning feeling. It made my life very uncomfortable. I had a hard time walking, my legs felt like they each weighed 50 pounds. Once I got in my car and my feet felt so heavy I couldn't even drive the car. With Neuroflo I have no more tingling, cold or burning painful legs and feet. It went away."

WHAT DOCTORS ARE SAYING

"Now I finally have a natural solution I can recommend to my patients who suffer from leg and feet problems and pain. I'm delighted because previous treatments were not effective, but Neuroflo has worked for every one of my patients with no side effects" says Dr. Eric Wood, N.D.

Dr. Ryan Shelton, M.D. says "This is new and different. It works for people who've tried many other things before. It is natural with no side effects. Don't give up hope for your leg and feet pain, burning, tingling and numbing. This pill is working for countless people after other treatments have failed them. I highly recommend it."

"Neuroflo is a terrific choice for people with leg and feet issues. The clinical trials in support of this herb show it is very effective for safe and fast relief," said Dr. Wood, a Harvard trained doctor who has appeared on award winning TV shows.

Now you can get a good night's sleep - peaceful, restful sleep – with no pain, tingling, zinging, itching or zapping. Improve your balance and coordination. No side effects – safe to take with other medications. Enjoy your favorite activities and hobbies again. Be more active, have more fun, enjoy life more. Don't risk damage to your feet and hands. Don't let it get dangerously worse.

Neuroflo is GUARANTEED to work for you – or you will get full refund with a 90-day unconditional money-back guarantee. It is NOT sold in stores. No prescription or doctor visit is required.

UP TO 50% OFF FOR THE NEXT 10 DAYS

This is the official release of Neuroflo in the state. Therefore, everyone who calls within the next 10 days will receive up to 50% OFF their first order. A toll-free hotline number has been set up for local readers to call for up to 50% OFF savings. The number will be open starting at 7:00 am today and only for the next 10 days.

All you have to do is CALL TOLL-FREE **1-800-231-1335** and provide the operator with the special discount approval code: **NEF158**.

Important: Due to Neuroflo's popularity and recent media exposure on ABC, CBS and FOX NEWS, phone lines are often busy. If you call and do not get through immediately, please be patient and call back. Those who miss the 10 day deadline for up to 50% OFF will have to pay more for Neuroflo.

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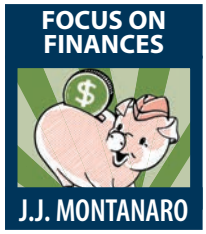
PERSONAL FINANCE

Roadblocks to financial security



Even as someone who works in the world of financial education, I recognize that information alone is not a cure-all. Knowledge may be power, but knowing what's right or what you should be doing is not enough. To bridge the gap to financial security, we must put that knowledge into action.

Seems simple enough, but if it were, we wouldn't see challenges like credit-card debt and a lack of savings as consistent stumbling blocks for Americans. So what's holding us back?

Sarah Newcomb, a researcher for *Morningstar* magazine, wrote an article in 2018 that summarizes the four main factors that drive our financial behaviors. My hope is that by understanding what shapes our behaviors, we have an opportunity to improve them.

▪ **Financial literacy does matter.** Good news for people like me: financial education does have a positive effect on our behaviors. However, it's a bit of a lightweight in terms of the punch it packs. Keep reading, keep learning, and plant seeds with your children and grandchildren; it does matter.

▪ **Be deliberate.** How many times have you made snap decisions that you later regretted? If you're like most folks, there have probably been some memorable ones. (For me, several relate to cars, but that's a story for another day.) The point is, impulsivity negatively influences your finances. You can combat the influence of impulse by relying on cooling-off periods or having discussions with your significant other/accountability partner before you make a big purchase, investment or other financial decision.

▪ **Craft your personal vision of the future.** People with good financial habits take the long view. As someone who has worked in the world of financial planning for 25 years, I know your vision for the future provides a powerful "Why?" that can keep you on the straight and narrow. Taking the time to write down your personal goals will help you shrug off immediate gratification and embrace systematic saving, spending less than you earn and prudent shopping.

▪ **Embrace what matters most.** Shopping is a nice transition to Newcomb's final negative influencer: materialism. If having stuff drives your financial decisions, it follows that good financial habits may be a scarce resource in your life. Make a list of what's important to you. My guess is that list will be a lot less about stuff and a lot more about people and experiences.

While knowledge is not enough, it provides a great starting point. This year, keep your eye on the ball and shun the daily materialistic messages with which you're bombarded.

J.J. Montanaro is a certified financial planner with USAA, The American Legion's preferred provider of financial services. Submit questions for him online.

legion.org/usaa/focusonfinances

ACTIVE DUTY

Guardians at the ready

U.S. Space Force

The Space Force expects to nearly triple in size this year, according to Gen. Jay Raymond, chief of space operations. It will also add a reserve component in 2021, as *Stars and Stripes* reports.

By the end of this year, the Space Force will have some 6,400 active-duty personnel under its command – up from 2,400 troops at the beginning of 2021.

The initial cohort of Space Force personnel – now known as Guardians – was drawn almost entirely from the Air Force. But *Stars and Stripes* reports that 2021 "could be the year some space-focused troops serving in the Army and the Navy transfer into the Space Force."

Raymond, however, doesn't want to hobble his sister services. "You can't break the Army or you can't break the Navy while setting up the Space Force," he says. "So we'll do this in a way that consolidates those capabilities where needed and strengthens the joint war-fighting readiness on both the Space Force side and on the other services."

LABOR

Working through COVID-19

Americans spent 60 million fewer hours commuting to and from work each day at the height of the ongoing pandemic. *The Wall Street Journal* details how we spent all that extra time:

35% Working primary jobs

30% Leisure activities, including exercising or watching TV

15.5% Home-improvement projects

11.1% Child care

8.4% Working second jobs

Common obverse shown actual size

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How to submit a reunion

The American Legion Magazine publishes reunion notices for veterans. Send notices to ***The American Legion Magazine,* Attn: Reunions, P.O. Box 1055, Indianapolis, IN 46206,** fax **(317) 630-1280,** e-mail **reunions@legion.org** or submit information via our website, **www.legion.org/reunions.**

Include the branch of service and complete name of the group, no abbreviations, with your request. The listing also should include the reunion dates and city, along with a contact name, telephone number and e-mail address. Listings are publicized free of charge.

Your notice will appear on our Web site within a week and will remain available online until the final day of your reunion. Upon submission, please allow three months for your reunion to be published in print. **Due to the large number of reunions, *The American Legion Magazine* will publish a group's listing only once a year.** Notices should be sent at least six months prior to the reunion to ensure timely publication.

Other notices

"In Search Of" is a means of getting in touch with people from your unit to plan a reunion. **We do not publish listings that seek people for interviews, research purposes, military photos or help in filing a VA claim.** Listings must include the name of the unit from which you seek people, the time period and the location, as well as a contact name, telephone number and e-mail address. Send notices to ***The American Legion Magazine,* Attn: "In Search Of," P.O. Box 1055, Indianapolis, IN 46206,** fax **(317) 630-1280** or e-mail **reunions@legion.org.**

The magazine will not publish names of individuals, only the name of the unit. Listings are published free of charge.

Life Membership notices are published for Legionnaires who have been awarded life memberships by their posts. **This does not include a member's own Paid-Up-For-Life membership.** Notices must be submitted on official forms, which may be obtained by sending a self-addressed stamped envelope to ***The American Legion Magazine,* Attn: Life Memberships, P.O. Box 1055, Indianapolis, IN 46206.**

"Comrades in Distress" listings must be approved by the Legion's Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation division. If you are seeking to verify an injury received during service, contact your Legion department service officer for information on how to publish a notice.

To respond to a "Comrades in Distress" listing, send a letter to ***The American Legion Magazine,* Attn: Comrades in Distress, P.O. Box 1055, Indianapolis, IN 46206.** Include the listing's CID number in your response.

"Taps" notices are published only for Legionnaires who served as department commanders or national officers.

AIR FORCE / ARMY AIR FORCES

57th Trp Carrier Sqdn, 57th Mil Airlift Sqdn, 57th Airlift Sqdn & 57th Wpns Sqdn, Branson, MO, 9/23-26, Woodrow Hall, (239) 850-1758, president@57thalumni.com; **601st Tact Cntl Sqdn,** Oklahoma City, 6/16-19, Paul Mussolino, (937) 838-0812, mussolino@earthlink.net

ARMY

3/325 Abn Bn (Vicenza, Italy), Morehead, KY, 6/4-6, Joey King, (615) 485-1616, jbkranger@aol.com; **25th Inf Div,** Honolulu, 10/3-10, Sarah Krause, (215) 880-0181, tropicltn@aol.com; **Arizona Army Sec Agency,** Tucson, AZ, 8/13-15, Gerald Darr, (480) 507-6825, ardf308@gmail.com

JOINT

Bien Hoa AB, Branson, MO, 9/29-10/2, Chuck Golba, (913) 915-6093, cgolba67bienhoa@gmail.com; **Opn Paul Bunyan 45th Anniv,** Kansas City, MO, 9/28-10/3, Mike Davino, (919) 498-1910, 2ida.pao@charter.net

MARINES

Mar Barracks, London/FMF Europe (1980-1986), Nashville, TN, 10/17-20, Larry Powers, (760) 983-5190, larry.powersusmc@yahoo.com

NAVY

***Abnaki* ATF 96,** San Antonio, 9/27-30, Steven Andersland, (210) 410-1820, sandersland@outlook.com; ***Compton* DD 705,** Saratoga Springs, NY, 5/3-5, Bob DiMonte, (850) 492-3483, bobdimo@cox.net; **Destroyer Leader Assn,** Branson, MO, 9/27-10/2, Mike Bugara, (401) 635-8860, mjbugara@hotmail.com; ***Donner* LSD 20,** Buffalo, NY, 5/3-6, Dennis Heimbach, (610) 775-7539, dennisheimb@gmail.com; ***Glacier* AGB 4,** Colorado Springs, 9/22-26, Chuck White, (802) 426-3113, wxmanret43@fairpoint.net; ***John S. McCain* DL 3/DDG 36,** Branson, MO, 9/27-10/2, Peter Peterson, (321) 952-2066, retep401@gmail.com; ***Mitscher* DL 2/DDG 35,** Branson, MO, 9/27-10/2, Gary Marchido, (231) 206-1665, garymarchido@aol.com; ***Norfolk* DL 1,** Branson, MO, 9/27-10/2, Robert Godas, (516) 592-1834, robertgodas190@gmail.com; ***Oklahoma City* CL 91, CLG/CG 5 & SSN 723,** Colorado Springs, 9/27-10/3, John Baker, (620) 399-3999, rlbjfb@cox.net; ***Patrick* SSBN 599,** Kings Bay, GA, 11/4-7, Ron Pelletier, (508) 769-2360, rpelle9011@aol.com; ***Scamp* SSN 588,** Rapid City, SD, 5/17-21, Rod Stark, (702) 582-1424, campreunion2021@virtualmemorypix.net; ***Wilkinson* DL 5,** Branson, MO, 9/27-10/2, John Lair, (619) 479-7387, hobocamp@aol.com; ***Willis A. Lee* DL 4,** Branson, MO, 9/27-10/2, Frank Graham, (718) 934-6410, frankdl4@optonline.net

IN SEARCH OF

22nd Ord Det (Cpl Msl), 80th Arty (Vicenza, Italy, 1961-1964), Ken Koenitzer, (973) 721-4052

35th Cbt Eng Bn, HHC Med Section (Binh Thuy, Vietnam, 1970), Rick Bentin, (605) 460-1720, rbenting@midco.net

111th Eng (WS) (Vietnam, 1966-1970), Joe Sousa, (860) 989-8683, usasgm92@comcast.net

241st MP Co (Fort Monmouth, NJ, 1973-1974), Gary Bohnenstiehl, (618) 581-7161, bohnensg@gmail.com

275th Armd Field Arty Bn (Battle of the Bulge, 1944), William Pilati, (330) 868-5794

***Belmont* AGTR 4 (Norfolk, VA, 1965-1967),** Paul Moore, (704) 609-2432, moorepa@yadtel.net

D Co 2nd ABG 187th Inf (Fort Campbell, KY, 1960-1963), Donald Nabozney, (810) 364-4265, dgnabozney@comcast.net

Fire Et (Camp Lejeune, NC, February 1970), Mike Childs, (763) 521-5257

***Implicit* MSO 489 (1988),** Michael Weston, (925) 686-6707, mnsweston@yahoo.com

USMC Camp Lejeune, NC (Feb 1951) & 2nd Mar Div FMF, Al Heidler, (954) 999-9578, mh5942@hotmail.com

TAPS

James R. Chapman, Dept. of Pennsylvania. Dept. Cmdr. (Virginia) 2015-2016, Nat'l Foreign Relations Cncl. Vice Chmn. 2006-2007, Nat'l Law and Order Cmte. Memb. 2007-2013 and Nat'l Law and Order & Homeland Security Cmte. Memb. 2013-2021.

Stanley H. Clark, Dept. of New York. Dept. Cmdr. 2005-2006, Nat'l Exec. Cmte. Alt. Memb. 2011-2013, Nat'l Americanism Cncl. Vice Chmn. 2003-2013, Nat'l Exec. Cmte. Memb. 2013-2015 and Nat'l Veterans Affairs & Rehab. Cmsn. Liaison Cmte. Memb. 2013-2015.

C. Darrel Haskell, Dept. of South Dakota. Nat'l Vice Cmdr. 1995-1996, Dept. Cmdr. 1985-1986, Nat'l Americanism Cncl. Vice Chmn. 2007-2012, Nat'l Cemetery Cmte. Consultant 1979-1995, Nat'l Distinguished Guests Cmte. Vice Chmn. 2012-2013, Nat'l Mbrshp. & Post Activ. Cmte. Memb. 1973-1974, Nat'l Veterans Affairs & Rehab. Cmte. Memb. 2005-2007, Nat'l Veterans Affairs & Rehab. Cmte. Region 6 Chmn. 1998-1999, 2001-2002 and 2004-2005, Nat'l Veterans Affairs & Rehab. Cmte. Region 6 Vice Chmn. 1997-1998, 2000-2001 and 2003-2004, and Nat'l Veterans Affairs & Rehab. Cmte. Region 6 Memb. 1996-1997, 1999 to 2000 and 2002-2003.

Michael T. Miller, Dept. of New York. Nat'l Law and Order Cmte. Vice Chmn. 1978-1979, Nat'l Law and Order Cmte. Memb. 1977-1978 and Nat'l Naval Affairs Cmte. 1979-2006.

Marvin R. Siegfried, Dept. of Hawaii. Dept. Cmdr. 2006-2007, Nat'l Exec. Cmte. Alt. Memb. 2011-2013 and 2017-2021, Nat'l Americanism Cncl. Memb. 2017-2021, Nat'l Citizens Flag Alliance Dept. Chmn. 2014-2016, Nat'l Exec. Cmte. 2013-2017, Nat'l Veterans Affairs & Rehab. Cmsn. Memb. 2005-2007, Nat'l Veterans Affairs & Rehab. Cmsn. Liaison Cmte. Memb. 2013-2017 and Nat'l Veterans Affairs & Rehab. Cmsn. Region 7 Memb. 2004-2005.

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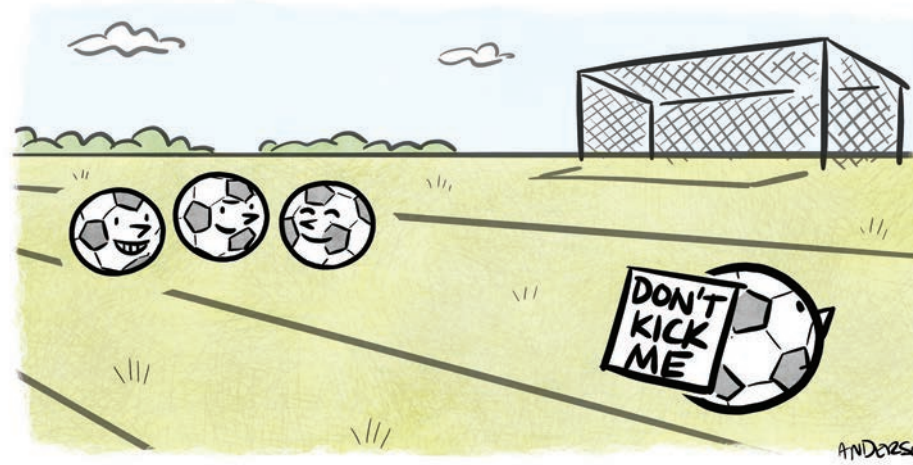
1-800-451-4463
www.iccoin.com/n5937



I killed two birds with one stone by giving up my New Year's resolutions for Lent.

WITH THE INVENTION of self-driving vehicles, it's only a matter of time before we get a country song where a guy's truck leaves him too.

A BOY is listening to the car radio with his father. "Dad," he asked, "what music did you like when you were growing up?"

"Well, I was a huge fan of Led Zeppelin," the father replies.

"Who?"

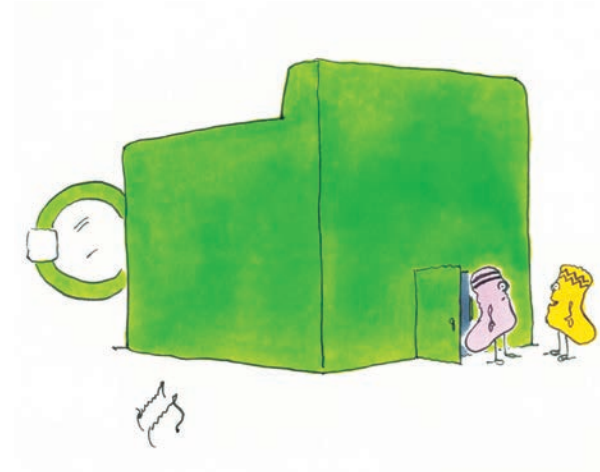
"Yeah, I liked them too."

A GUEST is ordering at a restaurant. "Do you think you could bring me what that gentleman over there is having?" he says.

The waiter looks at him sternly. "No sir," he replies. "I'm sure he intends to eat it himself."

I WAS THE BEST door-to-door security alarms salesman for several years running. The trick was to just leave a brochure on the kitchen table if there was nobody home.

MY TOWN is so dull that the post office has "Wanted" posters of people who have overdue library books.



"Welcome to the witness protection program."

"It's toxic, but it's all-natural toxic."

THE MAN who created autocorrect has died. Restaurant in peace.

A HUMAN CANNONBALL decided that he was too old to go on being shot across a circus arena into a net night after night. He went to the circus owner and told him he was going to retire.

"You can't!" the owner cried. "Where am I going to find a man of your caliber?"

I DON'T WANT a talking car. When I get stopped by the police, it might squeal on me.

EVERY NOVEL is a mystery novel if you never finish it.

I WENT to see the doctor about my short-term memory problems. He made me pay in advance.

AS I GET OLDER and remember all the people I've lost along the way, I think to myself, "Maybe a career as a tour guide wasn't for me."

"WOULDN'T exercise be more fun if calories screamed while you burned them?" – *Bill Murray*

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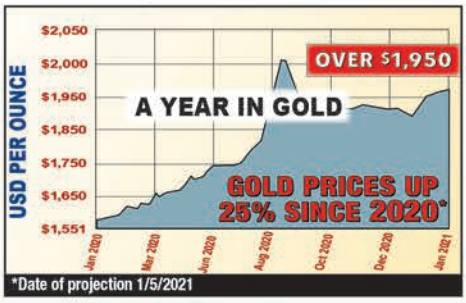

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